

Silver Screen to Green Screen: Hollywood Blockbusters as Communication and Education Tools on Environmental Issues

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ABSTRACT

AMANDA KOMAR: Silver Screen to Green Screen: Hollywood Blockbusters as
Communication and Education Tools on Environmental Issues
(Under the direction of Lois Boynton)

Using content analysis, this study will examine how the use of feature-length fictional films with environmental themes can be used as a communication and education tool for environmental issues currently present in the world today.

A total of 14 films were viewed for this study. Two films were removed from analysis because their plots revolving mainly around political themes, rather than environmental themes. In total, 11 major environmental themes were identified, the most prevalent being protection/treatment of animals, pollution/dumping, and natural resource exploitation.

The films were all framed in a pro-environment fashion in which the protagonist is fighting for the environment and the environment is portrayed as the fragile and innocent victim. Each film had poignant take home messages that could be used to communicate important environmental issues to the public.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Imagine sitting in a sold-out movie theatre watching the latest big-budget blockbuster from the entertainment industry's most-visionary director. The film is one of the most expensive ever made, employs the latest camera and sound technology, and features some of Hollywood's biggest stars. It has a believable plot, well-developed and relatable characters, and expansive background vistas, filmed on location in a pristine national forest. Long after the credits roll, films that are technically and systematically well-made—like the one described above—might have theatre patrons talking about their favorite scenes, the intense action sequences, or ideally, just exactly what the filmmakers tried to convey to the audience.

Films have the ability to reach and influence a huge number of people. Moreover, films have the unique opportunity to explain complicated issues about science and the environment to an audience that might not otherwise have any knowledge or understanding of these issues. A fictional film that explores environmental issues presently existing in the world, such as *Avatar* and the issue of the destruction of the rainforest, gives filmmakers the ability to present complex subject matter in an easy to communicate and understandable format.

Films fall into the category of what Cox (2010) terms “visual rhetoric.” Cox claims that rhetoric is not limited to just speaking or writing, as it is traditionally defined, but extends to visual representations, as well. These visual representations, whether appealing (a colorful mountain sunset) or disturbing (birds covered in oil), play a vital

role in not only bringing information about the environment to the public, but also influencing the public to change its attitude and behavior toward the environment.

This study will discuss how environmental issues can be communicated through films, and is best explained, as it related to public relations, through framing theory. The first half will review past literature and research that relates to the research topic, first by analyzing the impact films have on audiences. It will identify specific films of different genres, such as dramas and westerns, with underlying environmental themes and how those themes are manifested on screen. In terms of framing theory, the literature review will analyze how it is the best theory to explain how films educate, raise awareness, and influence the public. This section of the literature review will conclude with a review of framing research and a discussion on how public relations theory and film can be used together to communicate and educate the public on current environmental issues.

The second half of this study presents the research of the study. It will explain the actual design of the experiment and how it will be carried out. It will include an analysis of a series of films and a discussion of the results.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

The Impact of Film

In 2009, more than 217 million people in North America bought a total of 1.42 billion movie tickets, spending \$10.6 billion at the box office (MPAA, 2010). More than 30 of those films had total domestic revenues of over \$100 million (the-numbers.com, 2010). Despite rising ticket prices over the past several years and an economic recession, movie tickets sales are steadily increasing (MPAA, 2010). These staggering numbers demonstrate just how powerful the entertainment industry is and how its influence can extend all over the world.

Films Produced for Educational Purposes

Madsen (1994) identifies several different categories of films that serve an educational purpose: single-concept, modified dramatic, documentary, animated, process (a film that shows viewers how something works), and programmed instruction (a film that teaches a subject incrementally in a question/answer format). According to this list, Hollywood blockbusters would not have a place in any of these categories except perhaps modified dramatic films. Modified dramatic films are often made to teach an audience about the consequences of certain behaviors, but appeal more to the viewer's emotion and relationship to the central character (Madsen, 1994). For educational purposes, and unlike in Hollywood blockbusters, the climax is omitted in modified dramatic films so the audience has something to ponder and discuss following the screening.

Films have been used to teach alcoholics and their mentors how to deal with drug

dependency (Cape, 2009), elementary school students about American and world history (Stoddard & Marcus, 2010), and even family therapists to better understand and aid dysfunctional families (Blummer, 2010). Oftentimes, dramatic educational films are made to teach a history lesson (Stoddard & Marcus, 2010). Most of these films, however, are made specifically for an educational purpose for use in a classroom, not as a studio-backed film slated for international distribution.

There have been some feature Hollywood films that have been adapted for classroom instruction, such as *The Ox Bow Incident*¹, released in 1943 and *The Battle of Algiers*², released in 1966 (Madsen, 1994). More-recent dramas, such as *Ride with the Devil*³ (1999) and *Enemy at the Gates*⁴ (2001) have been used by countless high school history teachers as a supplement to their lessons (Stoddard & Marcus, 2010) and even law schools are using films to provide a basic understanding of criminal, tax, and family law (Adjin-Tetty & Kodar, 2009). The use of films as a learning tool, providing understandable and visual examples of the subject matter, helps supplement educators teaching lessons on complex subjects about which many people might not have any prior knowledge.

Depictions of the Environment in Film

Films are an important tool in the dissemination of pro-environmental messages,

¹*The Ox Bow Incident* (1943) is a Western film about a lynch mob that tries and hangs three innocent men for robbery and murder without a trial.

²*The Battle of Algiers* (1966) is based on the French oppression of Algeria and the ultimate uprising of the native Algerians, who employ the use of terrorist tactics against the French occupiers.

³*Ride with the Devil* (1999) follows the path of two young men from Missouri at the start of the American Civil War.

⁴*Enemy at the Gates* (2001) depicts the harsh conditions of the Russian front during World War II and follows the life of an eager Soviet soldier who becomes an infamous sniper.

due to their marketability and often worldwide distribution (Sturgeon, 2009). For the purpose of this study, “environmental” is defined as having an ethical stewardship and responsibility toward protecting natural habitats. As far back as the 1930s, environmental themes have been featured in cinema and are particularly prominent in Hollywood westerns (Carmichael, 2006). Lawrence (2006) claims that westerns can be grouped into five categories corresponding to the ecosystem or environmental concern around which they revolve. The five categories are:

- Dust and Flood in the Great Depression
- The Forest
- The Oil Field
- The Mining Film
- The Nuclear West

In all of the examples of films Lawrence (2006) uses to explain each of the above categories, he notes that many of the films’ protagonists are environmental champions, while many of the antagonists are out to destroy the environment for financial gain. Lawrence uses film examples from the 1930s to the 1990s, to show that environmental themes have been present in cinema (at least in Hollywood westerns) for decades.

Television has also explored environmental issues. In a content analysis of story themes in several prime-time television shows (prime time is defined as the hours between 7 and 11 p.m.), Shanahan and McComas (1997) found that the environment, while not a central theme, is a theme in television shows nonetheless. The most-common plot lines of the shows that discuss environmental issues were either about environmental activism or species protection, particularly when a character in the program is an animal. Due to its lack of occurrence in prime-time television and its portrayal alongside behavioral changes of characters, the researchers labeled the environment as a social

issue, while more commonly occurring themes, such as relationships and financial success, were labeled as lifestyles.

Documentaries are one of the best tools filmmakers can use to educate and raise awareness about environmental issues occurring today. Documentary films about nature and wildlife, like the Discovery Channel™ hit *Planet Earth*, are made specifically for educational purposes to teach viewers about natural science and allow them to see a part of the planet they would never otherwise have the opportunity to see first hand (Wright, 2010). Other, more-investigative documentaries that examine environmental destruction, such as *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) that deals with global warming or *The Cove* (2009) that deals with the mass slaughter of wild dolphins, are meant to raise awareness about a particular environmental issue. The goal of these films is to illicit an emotional response that will encourage the viewer to take action in favor of environmental conservation (Bousé, 2000).

Bousé (2000) describes environmentally themed nature programs and documentaries as tried-and-true film productions, with certain narrative formulas and consistent themes and characters that make this particular variety of film its own “full-fledged film genre” (p. 20). However, Cottle (2004) argues that nature films have lost their audience appeal and power precisely because there is such a prescribed formula for producing these films, which results in predictable themes and outcomes. Documentaries are usually created about a specific issue at a specific time for a specific audience, and aside from *An Inconvenient Truth*, which was backed by former U.S. Vice President and Presidential-candidate Al Gore, do not often have a wide distribution, limiting their power to educate a large number of people (Wright, 2010). Additionally, the impact of

documentary films is not positively correlated with the growing environmental concern of the public (Cottle, 2004). In other words, environmental documentaries released today do not often address issues that are currently of public concern.

Wildlife programs for television, while not necessarily a Hollywood production, often yield high ratings due to the universal appeal of watching animals interacting in their natural environments. Making an animal the main character of a fictional program and giving them human characteristics connects the audience with environmental issues (Shanahan & McComas, 1997). Going one step further and incorporating relatable characters and emotional narratives help drive the dramatic appeal of the film (Cottle, 2004). Films with environmental themes are their most powerful with audiences when it conjures up a subconscious feeling of nostalgia we all share for a clean, healthy planet (Murray & Heumann, 2009). These messages gain strength when this nostalgia is coupled with an emotional plea. Environmental messages also gain strength with the audience when they are subtle and are not obviously environmental messages.

Among the latest Bruce Willis action flick, Kate Hudson romantic comedy, or Leonardo DiCaprio drama, environmentally themed films have the potential to find their place in mainstream Hollywood. Cottle (2004) makes a case for environmentally themed blockbusters, especially if they star A-list celebrities who are able to attract a great deal of attention, both from the commercial and the public point of view. Coupled with an interesting plot and relatable characters, the films could have a substantial impact on the public's awareness of environmental issues. Therefore, the focus of this study will be to examine how big-budget, studio-backed films (from here forward known as "blockbusters") can act as communication tools about environmental issues.

Blockbuster Films that Explore Environmental Issues

Dramatic scenes of a 1,000-foot tidal wave, millennia-year-old snow-capped mountains crumbling to the ground, and metropolitan cities destroyed by freak tornados are gripping images that a director might use to emphasize the drama, whether realistic or not, that takes place in nature. Showing images of how destructive the environment can be is actually an effective way of attracting audience attention (Shanahan & McComas, 1999). Filmmakers are moving away from making audiences comfortable and are putting the destructive forces of nature on full display (Cottle, 2004).

An environmental report produced by the University of California-Los Angeles found that films with prominent environmental messages have increased since 2002 (Murray & Heumann, 2009). A host of recent blockbuster films have explored environmental issues, such as *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) and *Avatar* (2009). These two films, which were both distributed by 20th Century Fox, were shown in theatres all over the world. *The Day After Tomorrow*, which explores the effects of climate change due to air pollution, earned more than \$544 million in theatres, but received criticism from climate scientists that the situations depicted in the film could never happen. However, a review of the film from *Spirituality and Practice Magazine* claims

Whatever you think of the scientific explanations given for the phenomenon, the movie deserves praise for making one thing very clear: humans, especially in the industrialized countries, are the evil-doers who are responsible for the destruction of the good earth. (Murray & Heumann, 2009)

The ecological message in the film, no matter how outrageous and unrealistic, can show viewers what could happen to the planet if humans continue their consumptive lifestyles.

Avatar, which takes place on a fictitious planet and explores the destruction of a lush rainforest—and consequently the displacement of a tribe of indigenous locals—in order to cultivate a precious metal, earned \$2.7 billion at the box office, making it the highest-grossing film of all time. Despite the criticism that such films are far-fetched examples of the fantasy genre, they boldly explore the potential consequences of destructive practices to the environment, practices that are taking place in society today. These films were seen by millions of people, proving that the large distribution of the films can increase the probability that they will influence moviegoers to take a new interest in these environmental issues.

As discussed above, one of the biggest criticisms of *The Day After Tomorrow* and *Avatar* is that they are not realistic. However, there are several widely distributed films that also explore environmental issues and are based on real events. *Erin Brockovich* (2000) is based on a lawyer's assistant who stumbles upon evidence that families in a rural southern California town are getting sick because of the illegal dumping of chemicals by a nearby factory. Similarly, *A Civil Action* (1998) explores a lawyer's struggles to prove that toxic waste dumped near a town in Massachusetts caused the death of several children from leukemia. These two films, which do have convincing storylines and are both based on real events, made \$125 million and \$56 million, respectively, worldwide (IMDB.com). The revenue the four films described in this section drew from movie ticket sales indicate they were seen by millions of people, which also indicate the environmental messages of the films were disseminated widely. The next step in the research is to determine if these messages were processed and accepted by the audience.

While this research will only examine whether environmental themes are present

in films, there has yet to be research analyzing what kind of effect the films have on the public, which would be an area of further research. The films described above are just a few examples of how blockbuster films have the potential to teach audiences about environmental issues and their consequences. Ultimately, the films have the potential to change the public's perception of environmental degradation, with the intention of bringing about changes in attitudes and behaviors.

Framing Theory

The best way to explain how filmmakers use films as communication and education tools is through framing theory. Framing can be described as a way to organize messages to identify and highlight the most-salient points. Academic research has established many definitions of framing theory as it relates to public relations and media effects. Entman (1993) defines framing three different ways. First, he broadly defines the concept of framing as a way to “describe the power of a communicating text” (p. 51). He narrows his definition by describing framing as a selection of certain aspects of an issue and highlighting those aspects in such a way that will result in a particular reaction from the public. Finally, he identifies four locations where frames can be found in communication: “the communicator, the text, the receiver and the culture” (p. 52). Communicators make decisions about how messages are framed, the text is where the frame actually exists, the receivers decide whether they want to view the frame the way it was intended, and the culture is the commonly used frames found in particular issues. The results of this study will not focus on how the message is interpreted by the receiver, which is known as the salience of the message. Rather, it will focus on patterns of the

text, dialogue and visuals.

Gamson (1989) characterized framing as a way to organize several aspects of a story in order to define the issue at hand. Reese (2001) takes Gamson's definition one step further by specifying that framing is a way to organize events so that they are easily understood by the news media, those who report the news and those who consume the news. Zoch and Molleda (2006) believe that "framing is critical to the construction of social reality—the way people view the world" (p. 282). They argue that framing theory can be found across disciplines (i.e., politics, health, the environment) because framing "involves selecting a particular viewpoint to bring to the fore as well as communicating some aspect of the whole to make it the salient point or points of the frame" (p. 281). For the purpose of this study, Zoch and Molleda's (2006) definition will be used as the primary definition of framing.

Framing in the Media

Images and information we receive from media, including blogs, news, television, and films influence how we perceive the environment and what actions we take (Cox, 2010). In the past five years, framing effects in mass media have been studied extensively (e.g., Evans, 2010; Kim & Ree, 2009; Matthes, 2008, 2009; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Seo et al., 2009; Zoch & Molleda, 2006). News framing of environmental issues is another topic that is commonly researched (Bendix & Leblrier, 1991; Brummans, et al., 2008, McCallum, et al., 1991; Riffe, et al., 2007; Vraneski & Richter, 2003). There is also extensive research on how environmental issues are presented on television (Anderson, 1997; Cottle, 2004; Holbert, et al., 2003; McComas, et al., 2001; Pelletier & Sharp, 2008; Shanahan & McComas, 1997, 1999).

Framing theory in the media, however, is not without its limitations. Media frames of the environment can actually hurt the image of the environmental movement by placing blame for environmental degradation on the public and alienating the audience, or even by covering the issue too much (Shanahan & McComas, 1999). Different stakeholders in environmental issues—be they environmentalists, politicians, property owners, or corporations—often compete to influence the framing of a news story, meaning the real issue might not necessarily be presented to the public (Cox, 2010). While much of the research mentioned above addresses how frames influence the public's view on political and social issues, there is still a lack of one established definition of framing (Carragee & Roefs, 2004).

Framing the Environment

Holbert, et al., (2003) identified three different types of environmental media on television; that is, media that discuss environmental topics: public affairs news programming, non-fiction nature documentaries, and prime-time entertainment television. Their research maintains that environmental themes are more positively framed in non-fiction programming that investigates wildlife and the wonder of nature. News programs tend to focus more on environmental disasters, and prime-time fictional television has little to no prevalent environmental themes, or at least any themes significant enough to determine a positive, negative, or neutral frame. This research supports Shanahan and McComas' (1997) findings that environmental themes are sparse in prime-time television programming.

News media, whether intentionally or not, often frame social movements like the environmental movement in a negative light, thereby delegitimizing the power of the

movement (Carragee & Roefs, 2004). This finding suggests that non-fiction environmental programs are more capable and the best option of potentially changing public attitudes about the environment. However, most of the research discussed here concerns news programming, documentaries, and television programming; researchers have yet to explore how feature-length fictional films communicate issues about the environment.

Some researchers have begun looking at the storytelling aspects of environmental news coverage. Shanahan and McComas (1999) prefer to research environmental themes and messages in popular culture through cultivation analysis, a theoretical approach of “storytelling, which assumes that repeated exposure to a set of messages is likely to produce agreement in an audience with opinions expressed in (or attitudes consonant with) those messages” (p. 117).

Cultivation refers to the process of accruing information as messages build up with increasing impact on an individual’s beliefs and attitudes (Cox, 2010; Shanahan & McComas, 1999). Similar to cultivation analysis is narrative framing, which Cox (2010) describes as

the ways in which media organize the bits and facts of phenomena through stories to aid audiences’ understanding and the potential for this organization to affect our relationships to the phenomena being represented. (p. 177)

Research has established that environmental programming of any kind—fiction or non-fiction—actively transmits messages about environmental issues to the audience (Holbert et al, 2003). An individual will be exposed to a great deal of subtle—and not so subtle—environmental messages through televised programming (Shanahan & McComas, 1997). An effective message should be tailored to follow an individual’s

decision-making process as his or her behavioral change takes place (Pelletier & Sharp, 2008). Additionally, messages are more effective when they are framed in a way that appeals to altruistic feelings in the audience rather than materialistic; in other words, makes the audience value personal feelings of health or well being over monetary gains. Despite previous research cited in this paper that non-fiction environmental programs lack originality in plots and themes, they are a better predictor of pro-environmental behavior because people with a concern for the environment actively seek out this type of programming (Holbert et al., 2003; Pelletier & Sharp, 2008). Further, these individuals who do seek out environmental programming subconsciously allow the media to shape their individual patterns of information consumption (Holbert et al., 2003).

Framing Theory as it Relates to the Cinema

Research on the use of framing to examine the impact of films is limited. There has been research on the affect of “killer women” out for vengeance in action dramas—such as *Terminator II*⁵ (1991) and *The Quick and the Dead*⁶ (1995)—on female empowerment (Vares, 2002). Research has found that many war films released during World War II contained negatively framed depictions of the Japanese and Germans, and these films were heavily influenced by the federal government (Christie & Clark, 2008). Other research focuses on the audience and how their reactions and interpretations of films vary depending on their previous attitudes toward the film’s themes (Hall, 2001).

Zoch and Molleda (2006) reviewed several studies that showed the power of the

⁵*Terminator II* (1991) is about the struggle to protect a teenage boy by his mother and a humanoid robot from the future.

⁶*The Quick and the Dead* (1995) is a western that revolves around a female gun-slinger who enters a dueling competition that will give her the opportunity to avenge her father’s death by killing a crooked politician.

government and influential corporate executives in setting the media agenda; it is not out of the ordinary to assume that influential film studios also have the power to set the public agenda through film. Hall (2001) notes that film reviews have the ability to set the media agenda because they not only help potential viewers decide if they should see a film, but also frames how the viewer should think about the film. One study examined media reviews of the 2005 blockbuster film *Brokeback Mountain* and found that critic reviews praised the film for its “universal love story;” however, the reviews were presented by the media in such a way that ultimately framed the film as a “gay cowboy movie,” which could potentially alienate audiences (Cooper & Peace, 2008). The screenwriter of *Brokeback Mountain* argued that the main theme of the film—that is, the frame in which she wrote it—was meant to highlight the homophobia that runs rampant in rural America. This resulted in the film being framed in three different ways: as a love story by the film critics, as a gay cowboy movie by the media, and as a representation of American homophobia by the screenwriter. This example shows how even though the screenwriter framed the film to portray how people are affected by homophobia, the media framed it as a love story between two men, thus affecting the way potential audiences might view the film and consequently, the lesson they might take away from it. Framing can have a serious impact, not only on the film’s success, but also on how it is received, interpreted, and accepted by the public.

Conclusion

The resurgence of the American environmental movement in recent years has allowed environmental narratives to find a place in popular culture (Sturgeon, 2009). Not

only do these narratives become a way of explaining cultural practices, they also become a way of explaining the concept of environmentalism. Environmental themes are found in many films, the audience just has to be perceptive of their presence and their meaning.

Hollywood has embraced the environmental movement, both on screen and off. Established in 1989, the Environmental Media Association (EMA) is Hollywood's premiere environmental consulting organization, working to bring the entertainment industry and the environmental community together to educate audiences through film, television, and music (www.ema-online.org). EMA's annual awards include categories related to content of films and TV shows with environmental messages, as well as a category for environmental practices during production. Films, especially studio-backed blockbusters, are already set up to be highly influential tools for social change; they have the financial resources to employ the best talent and technology, wide-spread distribution, and usually successful marketing campaigns.

Some of the research explored for the literature review suggests that readers turn to popular films, especially post-apocalyptic films, in order to get a glimpse of the planet's future according to the imagination of Hollywood writers (Brereton, 2005; Carmichael, 2006; Ingram, 2000; Murray & Heumann, 2009; Sturgeon, 2009). These same authors also break down and analyze several Hollywood blockbusters, so that readers might get a better understanding of what messages the film is trying to convey to the audience. While not a great deal of research has been carried out on the impact of environmentally themed films on public attitudes and behaviors toward the environment, existing research on the impact of television shows, documentaries, and news stories on public perceptions of the environment prove that popular media in any form, including

feature-length films, have the potential to communicate and educate the public on environmental issues. Depending on how a film is framed and presented to the public gives Hollywood blockbusters the opportunity to affect audiences with their environmental messages.

While this literature review has argued how films can be used to communicate environmental messages, the framing of that film can be an extremely important tool in which environmental messages are communicated and interpreted. The combination of film narrative and framing theory presents filmmakers, educators, and environmental activists with the opportunity to use films as an effective communication and education tool about current environmental issues.

Chapter 3. Research Questions

Nature documentaries, news programs, and television programs have already been shown to affect public attitude and behavior by different depictions and frames of the environment. This study aims to answer the question of whether Hollywood blockbusters are capable of having the same effect by examining the portrayal and framing of the environment in several different films. More specifically, this study will examine whether films that have environmental themes could be used to communicate and educate the public about environmental issues. The study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1 What themes are present that identify the films as “environmental?”
That is, do they address certain issues that are related to the environment
(i.e.: global warming, natural resource destruction, water pollution,
etc...)?

Recall that the definition of “environmental” as it pertains to this study is having an ethical stewardship and responsibility toward protecting natural habitats.

RQ2 What environmental issues are prevalent in the films analyzed for this
study and how are those issues presented in the film?

Chapter 4. Method

The study will use content analysis to evaluate 14 films, all with environmental themes. Content analysis allowed the researcher to identify whether environmental themes and messages are even present in the film and how they are portrayed in relation to the story.

All of the films chosen for analysis in this study have been released in the year 2000 or later. There has been a recent resurgence in the environmental movement, especially in the late 20th century to the present day, and has resulted in an overall rise in society's environmental consciousness (Dawson, 2010; Giesen & Hersey, 2010; Hicks, 2004; Johnson, 2006; Rudy & Konefal, 2007; Welsh, 2007). Because of this resurgence, films were chosen that were released within the timeframe of the modern green movement. To narrow the selection, films released between 2000 and 2010 were analyzed for this study.

A majority (85 percent) of the films (listed below) were chosen for analysis because of their recognition by the Environmental Media Association as strong, environmentally themed films. The EMA is often looked to as a resource for filmmakers and production companies interested in making their production environmentally sustainable. Since 1991, the EMA holds an awards ceremony every year honoring films that have made strides in environmental efforts, whether through their story lines or through the film's actual production, and "has been the only program solely devoted to celebrating the entertainment industry's environmental efforts" (www.ema-

online.org/awards). Due to its credibility with the entertainment industry, EMA was looked upon to justify the researcher's selection of films that will be analyzed in this study.

All of the EMA feature film nominees since the year 2000 were considered for this study. Plot synopses from both IMDB.com and rottentomatoes.com were reviewed to determine which films demonstrate more dominant discussions of the environment. These two movie databases were accessed for film synopses because they provide the most-comprehensive information about the films. Additionally, in a preliminary Google search for each film, the individual film's IMDB page and rottentomatoes.com page were among the first five hits, suggesting that these two film resources receive the largest number of website hits.

The film synopses revealed some of the films only marginally discuss environmental issues and have more-prominent themes other than the environment associated with the plot. After evaluating all of the film synopses, 18 of the EMA award nominees in the "Feature Film" category were excluded; 14 films (12 of which were EMA Feature Film nominees) were chosen for analysis in this study. The 14 films are:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. <i>Erin Brockovich</i> (2000) | 8. <i>Evan Almighty</i> (2007) |
| 2. <i>Silver City</i> (2004) | 9. <i>Into the Wild</i> (2007) |
| 3. <i>The Day After Tomorrow</i> (2004) | 10. <i>The Simpson's Movie</i> (2007) |
| 4. <i>Two Brothers</i> (2004) | 11. <i>There Will Be Blood</i> (2007) |
| 5. <i>Syriana</i> (2005) | 12. <i>The Day the Earth Stood Still</i> (2008) |
| 6. <i>Fast Food Nation</i> (2006) | 13. <i>Wall-E</i> (2008) |
| 7. <i>Happy Feet</i> (2006) | 14. <i>Avatar</i> (2009) |

The number in parentheses is the year the film was released. Detailed descriptions of these films will be provided in the results section.

As stated above, 12 of the films (*Avatar*, *Erin Brockovich*, *The Day After Tomorrow*, *Happy Feet*, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *Fast Food Nation*, *Silver City*, *Into the Wild*, *Evan Almighty*, *Syriana*, *Two Brothers* and *The Simpson's Movie*) are EMA award nominees in the "Feature Film" category. Of these films, *Avatar*, *Erin Brockovich*, *Happy Feet*, *Into the Wild* and *The Day After Tomorrow* were EMA award winners. Other films, such as *Wall-E* and *There Will Be Blood*, while not nominated for an EMA award, were chosen for analysis because their subject matter appears to reflect environmental issues present in today's society; *Wall-E*, about an uninhabitable Earth due to pollution and consumption of goods, and *There Will Be Blood*, about an oil baron whose own greed is placed above his own family and health.

Coding Categories

The researcher was the only coder involved in this study and analyzed each film for the following:

- A specific environmental issue or issues. This list was generated by watching the selection of films.
- Characteristics (positive, negative, and/or neutral) of the main character affected by the environmental issue. These characteristics were identified by watching the selection of films.
- Individuals or groups affected by the environmental issue.
- Representation of the "villain," generated by watching the films to determine prominent characteristics.

- Setting, which included geographic location and time period.
- Response of the characters to the environmental issue. Specifically, if the characters respond with proactive behaviors (such as protection or conservation of environmental resources), if they combat the individuals responsible for degradation of the environment, or if they are reactive and allow the degradation to occur.
- Filming techniques (use of sound, camera movement, camera framing, camera lenses and lighting). The importance of this coding category stems from employing different cinematographic practices, such as using sharp focus, upward camera movements, aerial tracking shots, and wide lenses to convey the grandeur of nature and give it a majestic and imposing presence (Ingram, 2000).
- “Environmentally friendly” actions on the part of the characters

The code titled “‘environmentally friendly’ actions on the part of the characters” is based on an *EMA Green Guideline*, a resource targeted at screenwriters that offers suggestions on different actions and behaviors on the part of the characters that reflects an environmental consciousness. This includes, but is not limited to, the characters recycling, using public transportation, shopping at a local farmer’s market, driving hybrid cars, and using reusable shopping bags. A full list of “green guidelines” can be found in Appendix A.

Codes were evaluated based on how frequently each code occurs, the relevance of the code to the plot, and the prevalence of the code in the story. The codes were collapsed into categories in order to better identify themes and frames.

Chapter 5. Results

The results showed some definite patterns among the different coding categories, such as the particular environmental issue discussed and representations of the villain. Some categories, however, showed results with no definitive pattern, such as response to the environmental issue. The results section will break down the patterns that emerged, noting how various films were portrayed in each coding category. First, a descriptive synopsis of each film is provided below.

Synopsis of Films

Erin Brockovich (2000)

Based on a true story, Erin Brockovich (Julia Roberts), a single mother of three, is hired as an office assistant for a lawyer, Ed Masry (Albert Finney). While organizing documents in a pro bono real estate case that involves the Pacific Gas and Electric Power Company and residents of small town Hinkley, California, she finds medical documents for one of the residents. She investigates into why medical information is relevant to the case and discovers evidence that PG&E is dumping toxic waste laced with high levels of chromium just north of Hinkley. The toxic waste is contaminating the groundwater, which is getting many residents sick.

Upon further investigation, Erin discovers that PG&E offered to buy several residents' properties in order to make way for a new highway cutting through the town. It turns out that most of these same resident's have cancer and PG&E is paying for their treatment, explaining why medical documents were included with real estate documents.

After this information comes to light, PG&E offers to settle with many of the residents in Hinkley, but the settlement is not accepted.

Erin visits Hinkley almost every day, learning about the stories of many of the residents and establishing a strong rapport with the residents. She convinces Masry to take on a tort case, instead of the real estate case he was originally pursuing and takes on more than 600 clients who have had medical issues after living in Hinkley.

The case attracts the attention of a second law firm that agrees to come on as a partner, suggesting they pursue a binding arbitration case, where there is not a trial by jury, but a decision by a judge without an appeal; if Hinkley residents win, they will receive compensation from PG&E immediately and the decision is final. Ultimately, the residents of Hinkley do not trust the new lawyers, demanding a trial by jury with PG&E and threatening to find new legal representation. Erin and Masry travel to Hinkley to try to convince the residents to stick with the case, and are eventually successful. While on this trip, Erin speaks to a former employee of PG&E who admits that he found documents dating back to 1966 that specifically state the water in Hinkley is poisonous; this former employee was supposed to destroy these documents, but stole them instead. All of the evidence Erin collected, along with testimony from residents and the document from 1966 results in a judge ordering PG&E to pay \$330 million to the residents of Hinkley. At the time, this case was the largest in a direct-action lawsuit settlement in U.S. history.

Silver City (2004)

Conservative politician, Dickie Pilager (Chris Cooper), runs for governor of Colorado and while filming an environmentally themed political ad, hooks a dead body

on his fishing line in the lake. Dickie's campaign manager, Chuck Raven (Richard Dreyfuss), is convinced a political opponent set them up and has a private investigator, Danny O'Brien (Danny Huston), look into the matter. The more Danny investigates, the more he realizes that Dickie is being manipulated by special interests groups and used as a pawn to run for governor; the Bentel Corporation (which is heavily influencing Dickie's campaign run), is trying to redevelop Silver City, Colorado, which is uninhabitable because of the environmental degradation that occurred through mining operations several years prior.

Danny investigates the three individuals Chuck suggested were behind dumping the dead body, and discovers more and more about how corrupt both the Pilager family and the Bentel Corporation is and how they are determined to privatize and develop the Rocky Mountain wilderness. Danny eventually gets fired when Chuck finds out he used to be a journalist, making him a potential threat for Dickie's campaign. Danny stays on the case, however, and meets with two Mexican migrant workers who know who the dead body that Dickie caught was and how he died. It turns out the man died in an accident at one of Bentel's slaughterhouses. The two workers were blackmailed into getting rid of the body and keeping the incident quiet. When Danny and the workers go to the area where the body was dumped, he finds that the old Silver City gold mine is being used as a repository for barrels of toxic waste. The mine has flooded, which means that the toxic waste is sitting in water that drains right into a nearby lake. Danny tells his old boss Mitch (Tim Roth) about the toxic waste dump, but when Mitch goes to investigate, he discovers the mine has been cemented closed to cover up the illegal dump. Dickie continues his campaign, running on issues such as economic development and

rights of private land owners. Simultaneously, dead fish start floating to the surface of the lake, presumably killed by contamination of the water from the dumped toxic waste.

The Day After Tomorrow (2004)

Jack Hall (Dennis Quaid), a climate scientist for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, is doing research in Antarctica when a huge chunk of the ice shelf breaks off from the continent, nearly killing him and two of his colleagues. He goes to an international climate conference to explain how global warming is causing changes in ocean currents and weather patterns, which can affect the climate and implores world leaders to change their climate policies.

Meanwhile, different areas of the planet are experiencing drastic changes in weather, from snowstorms in India, huge chunks of hail in Tokyo, and several freak tornadoes in Los Angeles. Jack discovers that three huge storms are forming over North America, Europe, and Asia that will throw the planet into a new ice age. He explains to the U.S. President and Chiefs of Staff that the massive storm forming over the U.S. will cover most of the country in thick snow, especially in the eye of the storm, where temperatures colder than -150 degrees Fahrenheit cause instant freeze.

Sam Hall (Jake Gyllenhaal), Jack's teenage son, is in New York City for an academic decathlon, where the city is experiencing heavy rains and mass flooding. Sam and his friends find refuge in the New York Public Library, where he manages to contact his parents in Washington, D.C. Jack tells Sam to stay inside, stay warm and that he is coming to get him. Jack departs for New York with two of his colleagues, Frank (Jay O. Sanders) and Jason (Dash Mihok).

Eventually, the dropping temperatures in New York freeze the standing water

from the flood, and the majority of the people seeking refuge in the library leave, despite Sam's attempts to explain to them that the storm will get worse and they need to find shelter. Only a small group of people listen to Sam, finding shelter deep in the library, where they keep a large fireplace burning constantly.

Jack, Frank, and Jason's truck gets stuck just north of Philadelphia and they are forced to walk the rest of the way to New York in the deep snow. Unfortunately, Frank falls to his death through the glass ceiling of a mall they are walking over (indicating how much snow has fallen). Jack and Jason continue the trek, seeking shelter in a deserted restaurant as the eye of the storm passes overhead. The next day they finally reach New York, where they find Sam and the others in the library and are eventually rescued by military search and rescue teams. The storm eventually dissipates, but has drastically changed the global climate.

Two Brothers (2004)

Sangha and Kumal are two tiger brothers who live in old temple ruins with their mother and father in the jungle of Southeast Asia. The father tiger is shot and killed when he tries to protect Kumal from treasure hunters. Sangha is carried away by his mother, but when she returns for Kumal, she discovers he has been taken by the treasure hunters and brought to a circus.

Meanwhile, Sangha and his mother are caught in a tiger trap, waiting to be hunted for sport by a wealthy aristocrat. Sangha's mother is shot through the ear, but manages to escape, while Sangha becomes a pet for the French Ambassador's son, Raul (Freddie Highmore). Sangha is chased relentlessly by Raul's mother's dog and she mistakes the destruction of most of the house as Sangha's fault. She ends up selling Sangha to the

same aristocrat who tried to kill his mother.

A year goes by and the tiger cubs have grown up. The circus owner sells Kumal to the aristocrat, with the intention of having him fight the aristocrat's tiger, who, of course, is Kumal's brother, Sangha. They recognize each other and play in the arena, much to the embarrassment of the aristocrat and the circus owners. They eventually team up to break out of the arena and work together to find food and live in the jungle.

The humans go out to hunt them down, including one of the treasure hunters McCoy (Guy Pierce) because he fears they will be a danger to humans since they had never learned to hunt as cubs; however, everyone else in the hunting party is humiliated that they were bested by two tigers and are out to kill them for revenge.

The hunters try to burn the tigers out of the jungle in order to kill them. Kumal jumps through the flames because of his training as a circus tiger. He returns because Sangha is unsure how to do it and non-verbally reassures him. They jump through together, all while McCoy is watching and is amazed by their behavior.

Raul tries to convince McCoy that he should leave the tigers alone and let them take care of themselves in the jungle. Raul runs into the woods and seeks out Sangha, telling him to stay in the jungle and never to return to the village. As Raul removes Sangha's ostentatious collar, McCoy watches in amazement at the interaction between the boy and his much-loved former pet. Kumal, meanwhile, finds McCoy and nudges at his pocket for the sweet lemon treat McCoy first gave him when he was a tiger cub. McCoy puts his rifle down and, in a symbolic gesture, asks the tiger for forgiveness. The tigers call out into the jungle and there is another tiger response. McCoy and Raul comment that maybe this tiger can teach them to hunt. It turns out that the third tiger is Sangha and Kumal's

mother, and the three are reunited.

Syriana (2005)

After losing control of oil fields in Middle-Eastern countries, American drilling companies are turning to questionable tactics to regain and stabilize their profits. Prince Nasir (Alexander Siddig), who acts as foreign minister to his father, the Emir's, kingdom, shuts out the United States completely and opens up natural gas fields to a Chinese drilling company. The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency sends agent Bob Barnes (George Clooney) to assassinate Nasir, telling Bob that he is the financier to an Islamic terrorist organization. Bob, who is captured and tortured by Hezbollah, is made into a scapegoat and tries to warn Prince Nasir when he finds out that the U.S.'s real intention for assassinating him is to get him out of the way.

Bryan Woodward (Matt Damon), a consultant for an energy company, is sent to the Emir's palace to try to negotiate a deal between his company and the Emir's oil interests. Prince Nasir, who is next in line for the throne, wants to use oil profits to bolster the country's economy and begin a new democratic reform. He wants to overturn his father's regressive rule and American-backed policies. He takes on Bryan's company to help him manage the country's oil economy, and Bryan eventually becomes his economic advisor. The Emir, however, chooses to skip over Nasir and give the throne to his youngest son, who is willing to continue his father's economic and regressive policies. When Nasir plans a military coup, the American government has Nasir assassinated through a remote missile attack on his convoy. Bob, who tried to intercept the convoy, is killed, as well.

Meanwhile, as the American drilling companies lose a refinery to a Chinese

drilling company in the Middle East, hundreds of people are put out of work and threatened with deportation. A Pakistani man, Wasim (Mazhar Munir), attends a school to learn Arabic so that he has a better chance to find a job and befriends a charismatic Islamic cleric. The cleric is actually an extremist and convinces Wasim to take part in a suicide mission to destroy an oil tanker.

Fast Food Nation (2006)

Don Henderson (Greg Kinnear) is the vice president of marketing for a fast food chain called Mickeys. It comes to his attention that fecal matter has been found in the frozen patties of the burgers and he travels to Colorado to the meat packing plant that supplies Mickeys burgers. Initially, he is slightly alarmed at the condition the cows are kept in, but upon inspection of the facility, realizes that it is actually very sanitary.

Don meets with a rancher named Rudy (Kris Kristofferson) who is described as eccentric and a little scary, but he is just concerned about the treatment of his cattle and upset that ranchers are getting driven off their land for development. He tells Don how the Uniglobe Meat Packing plant is greedy and tried to run his grandfather out of business. Rita (Raquel Gavia), who works with Rudy, tells Don how her son used to work at the plant and that the conveyer line is moving too fast for workers to properly clean and gut meat, resulting in meat becoming contaminated with fecal matter.

At this point, Don is disgusted by what he hears and meets with Harry (Bruce Willis), Mickeys' liaison with UMP, to discuss changing the slaughter procedures in the plant. Harry brushes it off and says it is only a matter of cooking the meat. At this point, Don has gotten nothing but resistance from Mickeys and is regretting the work he has done for Mickeys.

Meanwhile, a group of Mexican immigrants are crossing over the border into the United States, where some of them find work at UMP. They are treated poorly by the staff and given the worst jobs in the plant. Sylvia (Catalina Sandino Moreno) quits because she is too uncomfortable working in the plant, but her husband Raul (Wilmer Valderrama) stays on as a cleaner. Eventually he has an accident on the job, where UMP discovers he has been using drugs and says the drugs were to blame for the accident. He is fired with no medical compensation. Sylvia takes a job back at the plant where she is put on the kill floor and is brought to tears by how the cows are slaughtered.

Amber (Ashley Johnson), a high school student, is working at a Mickey's Restaurant to save money for college, but she is surrounded by people who convince her she can do something better with her life than work at a fast food restaurant. Her personal convictions and attitudes about Mickey's' business practices force her to quit her job and join an environmental group, where she suggests the group cuts the fence holding in cows destined for slaughter. The cows do not try to leave the pen and, perplexed, Amber runs before the police arrive.

The film ends with a group of Mexican boys arriving in the U.S. and being presented with a Mickey's kids meal as a welcome. Don still has his job as the vice president of marketing, though he looks incredibly unhappy to still be working for Mickey's.

Happy Feet (2006)

Two Antarctic penguins, Memphis (Huge Jackman) and Norma Jean (Nicole Kidman), fall in love and have a baby. During the winter, Memphis protects the egg while Norma Jean goes off to fish. Their son, Mumble (E.G. Daily), is a bit of a late

bloomer and does not take to being a penguin as quickly as the other young penguins. Penguins are defined by their “heart songs,” so all penguins are expected to be excellent singers; despite being tutored by multiple voice instructors, Mumble is a terrible singer, but has a unique talent for tap dancing. As a result, Mumble is made fun of and considered an outcast.

When Mumble grows up (Elijah Wood), he travels to the sea for his first fishing expedition, where he ends up getting separated from the rest of the emperor penguins. While trying to escape from a leopard seal, he meets up with another group of independent and outgoing adelic penguins who call themselves “the amigos.” They agree to help Mumble sing and win the affections of Gloria (Brittney Murphy), a female penguin he is in love with. Mumble’s singing fails completely, but he dances to accompany Gloria’s song and all the penguins sing and dance along. The older penguins do not approve of Mumble’s dancing, however, calling it blasphemy and blaming the food shortage on him. Mumble suggests that some outside entity is causing the food shortage and goes on a journey to find the “aliens” (which is what penguins call humans) to see if they know who is taking the fish.

Mumble and the amigos arrive at an area where there are several shipwrecked boats and a lot of garbage in the water, including several plastic six-pack holders. After barely escaping with their lives from two killer whales, the penguins almost get run over by a huge fishing ship. Mumble realizes the humans are taking all the fish and are responsible for the food shortage. He vows to stop the humans from taking the penguins’ fish and follows the fishing ship on an exhaustive journey all the way across the ocean. He washes up on the shore of a large city and ends up in a zoo. He eventually wins the

hearts of the humans who visit the zoo through his dancing, and is eventually returned to his home in the Antarctic, fitted with a tracking beacon. Mumble tries to explain that the humans (still calling them the aliens) are to blame for taking the fish, but thinks they can also help give the fish back. A group of human scientists arrives to monitor the penguins and at Mumble's urging, the penguins all dance together for the humans. The humans return from the Antarctic and share a video of the dancing with the rest of the human population, where people are so charmed by the penguins, lawmakers pass legislation that will prohibit fishing in the Antarctic and protect the penguin habitat.

Evan Almighty (2007)

Evan Baxter (Steve Carell) is a newly elected congressman who cares a great deal for materialistic possessions, but is idealistic and wants to change the world. Evan notices that animals start following him around and soon after, he is visited by God (Morgan Freeman) to build an ark. God has become upset at how consumptive and materialistic the world has become and is sending a flood so that humans can start anew.

Meanwhile, in his duties as congressman, Evan is asked to co-sponsor a bill that would allow privatization of national park lands. The writer of the bill, Congressman Long (John Goodman), is pro-development and pressures Evan to join the other co-sponsors, all who support development and privatization of public lands.

Evan agrees to both co-sponsor the bill and to build the ark. Over time, his appearance starts changing: his beard and hair grow instantly and all his clothing turns into old and rustic robes. Animals keep following him and it eventually leads people to believe he is insane. He is suspended from Congress and is removed from co-sponsorship of the bill.

Evan continues building the ark with the help of his sons and all the animals that start migrating onto his property. The local government threatens to tear down the ark and arrest Evan, but just before they do, the dam holding back the water in the nearby reservoir breaks, causing the flood. The flood carries the ark to Capitol Hill, interrupting the signing of the land act bill, which inevitably does not pass in Congress. Evan's suspension from Congress is lifted and he returns to work with a new outlook on life and nature.

Into the Wild (2007)

Chris McCandless (Emile Hirsch), an idealistic young man, graduates from Emory University in 1990, gives away all his possessions and drives west for what he calls "a spiritual revolution." He comes up with an alter-ego named Alexander Supertramp, and begins traveling around the west by any means he can, including hitchhiking, canoeing, and walking. He lives off the land for two years with the intention of ending his journey in the Alaskan wilderness.

Chris, now introducing himself as Alex, takes a job on a farm in South Dakota where he learns how to farm and hunt, but discovers that he is happier being penniless and living off the land. He leaves the farm and continues traveling through the west, waiting until the spring when he can travel up to Alaska. Throughout this time, Chris's appreciation for nature and what it has to offer for him spiritually reaffirms his desire to get to Alaska. He meets people along the way—including a middle-age hippy couple (Brian Dierker and Catherine Keener) who treat him like a son, a pretty girl (Kristin Stewart) he starts to fall for, and an old widower (Hal Holbrook) who offers to adopt him as his grandson—all who have a great effect on his own personal journey, and who are

equally as affected by him.

Chris finally makes it to Alaska, where he discovers living off the land is harder than he anticipated. He finds an old municipal bus, termed “the magic bus,” that is used as a shelter for hikers and sets up camp for himself. He quickly runs out of food and has difficulty keeping meat he has hunted from spoiling. After 10 weeks, he decides to return to civilization, only to discover that the creek he crossed to get to the bus has turned into a raging river from snow melt. He is beginning to lose hope and starts to go stir crazy. He eats the berries of a plant and realizes later that they are poisonous. Ultimately, he starves to death, but before he dies, he writes a letter to whoever finds his body about the spiritual journey he has taken and how happy he is to die in the wild.

The Simpson’s Movie (2007)

In the iconic opening credits, the rock band Green Day is playing *The Simpson’s* theme song on a barge, when the pollution from the lake starts eating through its stage. At church, Grampa Simpson (Dan Castellaneta) has a revelation and warns that something terrible will happen soon. Marge (Julie Kavner) takes it upon herself to try to decipher the meaning of Grampa’s warning.

While eating at a fast food restaurant, Homer (Dan Castellaneta) takes home a pig that is about to be slaughtered for a sandwich and treats it like a new member of the family. Feeling left out, Bart (Nancy Cartwright) goes fishing on Lake Springfield with Flanders (Harry Shearer) where he sees several people dumping waste into the lake.

Lisa (Yeardley Smith) canvasses door to door to spread awareness about the pollution in Lake Springfield. She implores the town during a town hall meeting to stop dumping waste in the lake and the mayor decides to make it illegal. The whole town

works to clean up the lake, but when no one is looking, Homer dumps all of the waste from his pet pig into the lake, which inadvertently poisons the water and causes the mutation of a squirrel.

The Environmental Protection Agency shows up and takes the squirrel, while the head of the EPA convinces the U.S. president that Springfield is the most polluted city in the country and orders a giant plastic bubble be placed over Springfield to avoid further pollution to surrounding areas. It turns out that Grampa's message was about the environmental degradation of the town. The town's police find the empty pig waste silo with Homer's name on it, and an angry mob tries to lynch the whole family. They escape through a sink hole in Maggie's sandbox that Homer neglected to fix and become fugitives on the run. They escape to Alaska and are upset to see the landscape ravaged by oil rigs. They pull up to the border where a border guard gives them \$1,000 as compensation for the oil companies to drill in the pristine wilderness.

Back in Springfield, the head of the EPA devises a plan to blow up the town. Marge, Bart, and Lisa return to Springfield to help, but Homer decides to stay in Alaska. After watching a farewell video Marge left for him, he decides to return to Springfield to be with his family. Marge, Bart and Lisa are caught by the EPA and are given laughing gas to make them all pass out. When they come to, they are in the middle of a decrepit and rundown Springfield and the EPA has lowered a bomb into the bubble that will destroy the town. Homer and Bart work together to throw the bomb out of the hole in the top of the dome. The bomb explodes, destroying the dome and Springfield becomes a normal, pollution-free town.

There Will Be Blood (2007)

Daniel Plainview (Daniel Day-Lewis), a gold miner in California, breaks his leg while down in a mine shaft and invents a rig so that the miners can dig deeper without having to spend time down in the shaft. When one of his workers accidentally drops the drill into the deep mine, Daniel discovers oil in the ground. His oil operation becomes very successful, but after another one of his workers is killed from a broken rig, Daniel adopts the worker's son, H.W., and ventures out to start his own oil drilling business. He tells people he runs an honest family business, and that his wife died giving birth to his son. He coerces landowners to lease their land to him for much less than it is worth so he can drill.

After receiving a tip about a large oil field on a family's farm by a young man named Paul Sunday (Paul Dano), Daniel and H.W. travel to northern California and survey the land. After they discover there is oil on the land, Daniel buys the farm for much less than it is worth and begins drilling. He hatches a plot to buy up the surrounding properties so that he can build a pipeline to the Pacific Ocean, saving on storage and shipping costs. He tells doubters of his drilling business that he is first and foremost a family man and his business will bring roads, employment, agriculture, education, and food to the small and isolated town.

Eli Sunday, the son of the farmer and Paul's identical twin brother, runs a church and manipulates Daniel to get funding for his church, but Daniel immediately distrusts him. The rig strikes oil, but the pressure released from the strike causes a huge explosion that results in H.W. losing his hearing. Daniel is only concerned about how rich the oil will make him and builds more rigs on the land.

A man shows up who claims to be Daniel's half-brother Henry (Kevin J. O'Conner), and Daniel comes to trust him implicitly, especially after he saves Daniel's life when H.W. tries to burn his cabin down. Daniel sends H.W. away for school and Henry becomes his business partner. Eventually, Daniel discovers that Henry is not actually his brother and is only trying to get his hands on Daniel's money. He shoots Henry in the head and kills him.

Daniel finally meets with the one landowner he needs to buy property from to build his pipeline to the Pacific Ocean. The landowner blackmails Daniel, telling him he knows what he did to Henry, but will give Daniel the land if Daniel joins his church, the same church Eli Sunday runs. Daniel agrees so he can get the land, but Eli puts him through a public and humiliating baptism service.

Several years pass and Daniel is a drunkard living in a mansion by himself. A grown up H.W. arrives to talk to Daniel about starting his own drilling company in Mexico, at which point Daniel turns vindictive, telling H.W. that he is not his real son and now he will only ever be competition. Eli Sunday visits Daniel with a proposition to drill on one of his parishioners' land, with a large part of the profit going to the church. Daniel taunts Eli and ends up bludgeoning him to death with a bowling pin. Daniel is left with no family and no potential news business.

The Day the Earth Stood Still (2008)

An anomaly is found by the U.S. government rocketing toward Earth at a very high speed. Right before it is projected to impact Earth, the anomaly, which is like a giant globe, slows and gently touches down in New York's Central Park. An alien form emerges from the globe, and in the panic, is shot by the military forces called to the

scene. Doctors manage to save the alien, when its skin starts peeling away to reveal an adult human life form.

The human life form, who calls himself Klaatu (Keanu Reeves), uses the technology and electronics in the room to escape from the military base. He calls one of the doctors who was originally called to the scene of the landing, an astrobiologist named Helen Benson (Jennifer Connelly), who is sympathetic and wants to help him. She helps him evade the government, but soon realizes that he has come to Earth on a mission to destroy the human population. Klaatu says humans are too destructive and the species must be wiped out if the Earth is to survive.

At this point, globes have been touching down all over Earth and are collecting animals in a makeshift ark so that they will be protected when humans are wiped out. However, as Klaatu witnesses the bond between Helen and her stepson (Jayden Smith), his notions about human compassion changes and he returns to Central Park as quickly as he can to stop the destruction of the human race. He barely manages to achieve this task, but an electronic pulse results in all technology on Earth to stop working, giving the human race a chance to rebuild its civilization.

Wall-E (2008)

Taking place in the distant future, a hard-working robot named Wall-E is the sole robot left to clean up a garbage-ridden Earth. Throughout the day, he periodically collects keepsakes of the junk as he sorts through it, including a boot with a green plant sprouting out of it. A robot probe named EVE (Extraterrestrial Vegetation Evaluator) is sent to Earth by humans in the Buy N Large Corporation (BnL) (who are living aboard a giant space ship named *Axiom* awaiting the completion of the Earth cleanup) to find

evidence that the planet can support life again. Inspired by the love songs in the 1969 musical *Hello Dolly*, Wall-E falls in love with EVE and when he shows her all of his keepsakes, including the plant, she takes it, goes into standby mode, and sends a signal back to the *Axiom* that plant life has been found. A ship returns to collect EVE and with Wall-E clinging to its hull, returns to the *Axiom*.

Aboard the *Axiom*, the human population is living a luxurious life, traveling around the ship on hovercrafts and being waited on hand and foot by a crew of robots. As a result, humans have become obese because of inactivity and consumption of unhealthy BnL products. EVE is brought to the captain of the *Axiom* (with Wall-E hiding in the shadows) only to discover that the plant is gone, leaving the captain to assume that EVE has malfunctioned. One of the other robots has actually taken the plant to destroy it, as the ship's auto pilot (which is a steering wheel named Auto) had been commanded 700 years previously by the BnL Corporation not to return to Earth, even if plant life is discovered. Wall-E manages to retrieve the plant from the robot, and EVE begins to show signs that she returns his feelings. Eventually they bring the plant back to the captain, where EVE shows him the footage she recorded of Earth, which is desolate and barren. The captain resolves to return to Earth to recolonize and save the planet. Auto and the captain fight for control of the ship as EVE and Wall-E rush to place the plant in a holding tank that will reset the *Axiom*'s destination coordinates to Earth. Wall-E is almost completely crushed as he tries to keep the door to the holding tank ajar while EVE places the plant inside.

The *Axiom* speeds back to Earth, and EVE frantically tries to put Wall-E back together again with the spare parts he keeps in his shelter. After briefly losing his

memory, Wall-E remembers EVE and they hold hands (a gesture he had been attempting throughout the film), while the humans begin to recolonize and grow new vegetation on Earth.

Avatar (2009)

A former marine, Jake Sully (Sam Worthington), takes the place of his recently deceased twin brother in a scientific program on the distant planet Pandora. The scientists use a technology that allows them to mentally link with bodies called avatars and look like the planet's indigenous people, the Na'vi. At the same time, a mining company is extracting a very valuable metal from the planet, and a large deposit of the metal sits directly underneath the Na'vi's lands. The mining company has every intention of driving out the local people in order to harvest the metal.

On his first venture into Pandora's wilderness in his avatar body, Jake is chased down by a hostile native predator and gets separated from the group. He spends the evening in the forest, but is found by one of the Na'vi, Nateri (Zoë Saldana), and is taken to their encampment, which is at the base of a giant and ancient tree. The leaders of the tribe are fascinated by him and invite him to stay with them and learn their ways. Jake, however, works as a double agent and sends reports back to the ruthless military leaders with information about the tribe and how their encampment is set up. Grace (Sigourney Weaver), the head of the scientific program, finds Jake is using this opportunity to spy for the miners, and moves the avatar base far from the human's headquarters.

Nateri teaches Jake how to hunt and act like one of the Na'vi, where he is eventually assimilated into the tribe. He is torn, however, between the Na'vi, where he is starting to feel at home and fall in love with Nateri, and the military, who he has sworn an

oath to. All the time he had been living with the Na'vi, he had been passing intelligence back to the military telling them how they can attack the Na'vi's stronghold. The blood-thirsty and unapologetic colonel (Stephen Lang) sends the full might of the military to destroy the home tree, killing scores of the Na'vi and displacing the whole tribe.

Jake and the other scientists escape from the military stronghold and return to the Na'vi who has found solace in their holy place. During the return, Grace is shot and in a last ditch effort to save her life, Jake is unsuccessful in bringing her back permanently into her avatar body. Jake, finally realizing where his loyalties lie, tries to lead the people into war against the humans by uniting all the tribes of the Na'vi.

The military arrives at the Na'vi's holy place with the intention of destroying it to run the Na'vi out permanently. Other tribes of the Na'vi have arrived to fight the military, and despite heavy casualties, the Na'vi, with Jake leading them, thwart the military's efforts of destroying the holy place. The humans eventually leave Pandora and through a ceremonial ritual, Jake abandons his human body and permanently becomes one of the Na'vi.

Analysis

After viewing all 14 films, *There Will Be Blood* and *Syriana* were removed from consideration from this study. While both movies explored oil exploration and drilling—an environmental issue that is of major concern today—the focus of the two films had more economic and political undertones, rather than environmental undertones. The effect of oil drilling on the environment was not discussed in either film. *There Will Be Blood* did contain one brief scene of oil drillers storing oil in an open, unlined pit which

has potential environmental implications, but it was not addressed in the film as an environmental concern and is too brief to have any bearing on the plot. The plot of *Syriana* revolved more around corruption of oil industries and governments in order to avoid losing money and continue an oil-based energy economy.

Environmental Issues Discussed in Each Film

A range of environmental issues were identified for each film. In most films, multiple environmental issues were identified. A more-specific explanation of the environmental issues' presence and prevalence in each film will be discussed below. After viewing each film and noting the major environmental issues, 11 main themes emerged. They are:

- Protection/Treatment of Animals
- Consumption of Goods/Materials
- Development
- Natural Resource Exploitation
- Pollution/Dumping
- Working Conditions
- Privatization of Public Lands
- Global Warming
- Groundwater Contamination
- Overfishing
- Appreciation of Nature

The table below shows the breakdown of each category and its presence in the 12 films.

Table 1. Breakdown of environmental issues and their presence in each film

	<i>Erin Brockovich</i>	<i>Silver City</i>	<i>The Day After Tomorrow</i>	<i>Two Brothers</i>	<i>Fast Food Nation</i>	<i>Happy Feet</i>	<i>Evan Almighty</i>	<i>Into the Wild</i>	<i>The Simpson's Movie</i>	<i>The Day the Earth Stood Still</i>	<i>Wall-E</i>	<i>Avatar</i>
Protection/Treatment of Animals				•	•	•	•		•	•		
Consumption of Goods/Materials					•		•		•	•	•	

	<i>Erin Brockovich</i>	<i>Silver City</i>	<i>The Day After Tomorrow</i>	<i>Two Brothers</i>	<i>Fast Food Nation</i>	<i>Happy Feet</i>	<i>Evan Almighty</i>	<i>Into the Wild</i>	<i>The Simpson's Movie</i>	<i>The Day the Earth Stood Still</i>	<i>Wall-E</i>	<i>Avatar</i>
Development		•		•	•		•			•		
Natural Resource Exploitation		•		•					•	•	•	•
Dumping/Pollution	•	•			•	•			•		•	
Working Conditions	•	•			•							
Privatization of Public Lands		•					•					
Global Warming			•									
Groundwater Contamination	•	•										
Overfishing						•						
Appreciation of Nature								•				

Protection/Treatment of Animals. This theme was one of the most-prevalent categories among all the films. Protection/treatment of animals includes incidences of protection of animals, exploitation of animals (including putting wild animals in zoos, poaching, and selling animals and animal parts as commodities), cruelty to animals, treatment of animals, and destruction of habitats in which animals are directly affected. Six films—*Two Brothers*, *Fast Food Nation*, *Happy Feet*, *Evan Almighty*, *The Simpson's Movie*, and *The Day the Earth Stood Still*—contain plotlines related to this environmental issue. *Two Brothers* discusses how poaching and selling animals and animal parts as commodities can have an effect on the environment. It portrays how tigers are treated as scapegoats, blamed for everything from killing farm animals to terrorizing a family dog. *Fast Food Nation* discusses how cows are kept in small confinements and dirty conditions before they are slaughtered. In the graphic scene that shows the slaughtering process, the animals are roughly handled, and it appears that they are in distress. *Happy*

Feet discusses species exploitation through the many penguins kept in the zoo exhibit and through humans taking tons of fish from the penguin feeding grounds. The plot of *Evan Almighty* is centered on Evan building an ark and saving two of every animal from a great flood sent by God. *The Day the Earth Stood Still* is also about species protection and saving animals from the weapon Klaatu will use to destroy the human race. *The Simpson's Movie* explores the animal cruelty aspect of this environmental issue, especially with the live pig that Krusty the Clown uses to promote his newest pork sandwich. The pig is saved from slaughter when it runs to Homer for protection. Though the pig is a new family pet, Homer pulls its tail and treats it roughly for his own amusement. Homer shows his cruel side to animals again when he uses sled dogs to get back to Springfield and runs and whips them tirelessly (the dogs exact revenge by mauling Homer and running away with the sled).

Consumption of Goods/Materials. This theme, which emerged in five of the films, explores the degradation of the environment as a result of consumption of material goods. In *Fast Food Nation*, this theme is presented by image montages throughout the film of fast food restaurant chains and nationwide commercial stores like Wal-Mart cropping up across the country. In *Evan Almighty*, this issue is presented by Evan's obsession of image and having the best and biggest of everything, including a cavernous house and a Hummer. *The Simpson's Movie* explores this issue very briefly, when Homer is talking about the American dream and looks out the window to see billboards selling products that are made in China. *The Day the Earth Stood Still* never shows any physical signs of consumerism, but it is because humans have become so consumptive and materialistic that Klaatu is sent to Earth to destroy the human population. *Wall-E*

presents the issue through images of huge BnL billboards throughout the city (an even on the moon) and BnL products consist of most of the trash Wall-E is cleaning up. Even aboard the *Axiom*, BnL still dictates daily life and humans are still consuming BnL products.

Development. This theme, featured in five films, refers to urban sprawl⁷, expansion into previously natural or wild areas, and development of lands for human use. *Silver City* explores this issue through Wes Benteen's desire to develop a site for a new and exclusive community in the mountains of Colorado. Wes' dialogue conveys that he has no interest in the environmental implications by developing the land. In *Two Brothers*, this issue does not necessarily refer to the development of natural areas for human use, but more so to the human expansion into previously wild territory. In the film, humans venture into the jungle of Southeast Asia looking for artifacts to sell, but end up encroaching on tiger habitat and driving the animals away from their home. *Fast Food Nation* briefly discusses this issue when one of ranchers explains to Don how previously open ranching land is now being developed for housing. In *Evan Almighty*, this issue is explored through Evan being asked to co-sponsor a bill that will not only privatize public lands, but will allow for residential and commercial development of those lands. Much like the portrayal of consumerism in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, depictions of development are never actually shown to the audience, but it is one of the reasons Klaatu has come to Earth to destroy the human race.

⁷“Urban sprawl” is defined as a pattern of development in which a community grows exponentially away from a city center (Frumkin, 2002). Sprawl has detrimental implications on the environment because it requires substantial amounts of new infrastructure, which threatens biodiversity, water and air quality, and reduces the amount of open space in a community (Buzbee, 1999).

Natural Resource Exploitation. The main issues that define this theme, viewed in six films, are oil drilling, mining, deforestation, and habitat destruction. *Avatar* is the one film that explores this issue most visibly. Not only do the humans conduct invasive mining practices for a precious metal, they are also drilling for oil (as indicated by the working oil rigs around the base), destroying parts of the rainforest to make way for bulldozers, tearing down the Na'vi's "home tree," and destroying the habitat surrounding the mining sites. They perform all of these actions with seemingly little regard to the welfare of the Na'vi. In *Silver City*, the Pilager family has made its fortune through gold mining, which has caused the land to be ravaged by the mining operation and has led to the contamination of the surrounding soil. While the main themes of *Two Brothers* is related more toward animal cruelty, the film briefly shows humans burning down parts of the rainforest to drive the tigers out of hiding and to displace them so humans can cultivate the land. *The Simpson's Movie* also very briefly discusses the exploitation of natural resources when the Simpson family travels to Alaska and is upset to see oil rigs dotting the landscape. A border guard then gives them \$1,000 as compensation from oil companies for "ravaging our state's natural beauty." *The Day the Earth Stood Still* explores this issue more from the habitat protection side of natural resource exploitation when Klaatu comes to Earth to protect it from further degradation from humans. *Wall-E* explores this issue through images more so than dialogue. The images show a very barren and brown Earth, in addition to drilling rigs and power lines dotting the landscape. There is one scene, however, in which dialogue states that Earth has become unsustainable and the directive never to return to Earth is indicative of the absence of all of Earth's life-sustaining natural resources.

Pollution/Dumping. Six films feature this theme, which includes pollution and dumping trash or toxic waste on both land and in the ocean. *Wall-E*'s attempt to clean up the mountains of trash left on the Earth is a clear example of the pollution/dumping theme in *Wall-E*. The amount of trash is further emphasized by huge stacks of trash that are taller than the surrounding skyscrapers. *Erin Brockovich* explores this issue through a utility plant improperly dumping toxic waste, which ultimately pollutes the nearby town's drinking water. *Silver City* explores this issue through the discovery that an abandoned mine shaft is being used to store toxic waste barrels, but since the mine shaft has flooded by rising water levels in the lake, the lake water has been exposed to and potentially contaminated by the toxic waste. *Fast Food Nation* only briefly discusses this issue as a rancher explains how his land is now being used as a dumping ground for unwanted junk by the rapidly growing urban population. *Happy Feet* also briefly explores the issue through a plastic six-pack can holder stuck around a penguin's neck, which ends up nearly choking him to death. *The Simpson's Movie* explores this issue through Homer's negligence in disposing of the pig waste, which results in the entire town suffering from the consequences.

Working Conditions. This theme, featured in three films, includes depictions of workplace conditions, treatment of workers and environmental justice. Environmental justice is defined by the Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Environmental Justice as

The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies... It will be achieved when everyone enjoys the same degree of

protection from environmental and health hazards and equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work. (www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice).

The issue is most noticeable in *Erin Brockovich* not through any physical depictions on screen, but from dialogue of the characters who claim that workers at the power plant were not provided with the proper equipment to protect them against soot and other chemicals used in the plant. *Silver City* and *Fast Food Nation*, on the other hand, do show images of workers working in poor and unsafe conditions for long periods of time. All three of these films explore environmental justice because the issue affects individuals with low socio-economic status and those who are desperately looking for work.

Groundwater Contamination. Groundwater contamination refers to toxic chemicals or materials dumped in such a way that groundwater, or water that usually supplies a community's drinking water, becomes contaminated. In *Erin Brockovich*, a large utility is dumping toxic materials unsafely in an open pit, resulting in both the contamination of a nearby town's groundwater and in hundreds of the town's residents getting sick with terminal illnesses. Similarly in *Silver City*, the Bentel Corporation was using sodium cyanide to clean gold that had been mined and leaving the leftover chemicals in leech piles, which contaminated the groundwater.

Privatization of Public Lands. This theme involves selling off public lands (such as national parks) to private buyers. It has significant environmental implications because it resulted in the banning of free use of the land by the public for commercial development. The two films that deal with this environmental issue are *Silver City* and

Evan Almighty. In *Silver City*, Wes wants to use Dickie to further his own agenda of developing areas for private sale of currently public-use lands, that is, state or national parks. The development of Silver City would be on top of a site that has been deemed highly contaminated with toxic chemicals; this could prove to be a major health hazard for individuals who live on that land. In *Evan Almighty*, Evan is asked to co-sponsor a bill that would lead to the privatization and ultimately, the development of national park lands.

Global Warming. The only film that deals with this issue is *The Day After Tomorrow*. In this film, Jack Hall tries to explain to world leaders how global warming affects ocean currents, which in turn affects climate patterns. The issue is depicted on screen by extreme weather and temperature fluctuations across the globe, from a series of tornadoes destroying Los Angeles to massive hail storms in Tokyo, and by the northern hemisphere of the globe being covered in a debilitating snowstorm.

Overfishing. The issue of overfishing is represented in one film, *Happy Feet*, by the penguin characters trying to figure out why their habitat's fish stocks have declined and by images of humans in commercial fishing vessels collecting large amounts of fish.

Appreciation of Nature. This particular theme does not refer to an environmental issue that results in destruction or degradation of the environment, but rather to an individual's appreciation and respect for nature. In *Into the Wild*, most scenes take place out in open, uninhabited areas or in the Alaskan wilderness. The film is about Chris becoming more connected with himself through nature.

In summary, there are five environmental issues that have prominence in more

than five films: protection/treatment of animals, consumption of goods/materials, development, natural resource exploitation, and dumping/pollution.

Of the remaining environmental issues found in the films, working conditions was found in three films, privatization of public lands was found in two films, and global warming, groundwater contamination, overfishing, and appreciation of nature were found in only one film. These themes, while not necessarily prominent in the majority of the films viewed for this study, play a major part in the specific film in which they are found. For example, the issue of overfishing in *Happy Feet* is relevant to the characters of the film, the penguins, because fish is their primary food source.

Characteristics of Main Character

There were very few characteristics of the main characters that were consistent across all of the films. Instead, this section will describe the individual characteristics of the main characters in each film.

The non-human main characters, that is: the penguins in *Happy Feet*, the tigers in *Two Brothers*, and all of the robots in *Wall-E*, are given very human and almost childlike characteristics. Mumble, the late-bloomer emperor penguin, is idealistic, brave, loyal, a dreamer, true to himself, unique and individualistic, unlike his peers. The tiger cubs in *Two Brothers*, Kumal and Sangha, are inquisitive, playful, loyal, and protective of each other. Both tigers even show signs of being depressed when they are separated from each other. Wall-E, the title character of the film is inquisitive, friendly, romantic, curious, bold, adventurous, a dreamer, and is in awe by the technology he sees on the *Axiom*.

While both *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and *Avatar* have human protagonists, they also have alien main characters. Klaatu is an intelligent extra-terrestrial sent to

Earth to protect it from additional harm by humans. As an alien, he is incapable of feeling human emotion, though he does find himself affected by the interaction between Helen and her stepson. He explains his purpose on Earth very rationally, but he is willing to listen when humans plead their case. Helen, the human counterpart in the film, is also extremely intelligent, but is sympathetic to Klaatu's mission. She understands why he is there, but tries to rationalize with him to change his mind about destroying the human race. Her trust in Klaatu and her love for her stepson makes Klaatu reconsider destroying the human race. In *Avatar*, even though Jake Sully is a human, he spends half of the film as a member of the Na'vi. Jake is hard headed and stubborn, but a natural-born leader, brave, and loyal. Even though he infiltrates the Na'vi under false pretenses, he eventually realizes where he belongs and fights against the humans, earning a place among the Na'vi.

Four films have only one main character—*Evan Almighty*, *Erin Brockovich*, *Into the Wild*, and *Silver City*. Evan Baxter is a family man, but he is materialistic and thinks now that he is a high-profile congressman, image is everything. He is hopeful and idealistic, however, and believes that as a congressman, he has the opportunity to help change the world. As he begins building the ark he comes to realize that family and protection of nature are more important than material possessions to living a happy life. Erin Brockovich, much like Evan Baxter, is also a loving and devoted mother to her three kids, takes her job very seriously, and is dedicated to finding justice for the Hinkley residents. While she can be crass and unsophisticated, she is persistent, relatable, and the people of Hinkley come to trust her implicitly. Chris McCandless, the lead character in *Into the Wild*, is probably the most philosophical and spiritual main character in all the

films. He has grand ideas about the world and wants to do something different with his life. Despite his high intelligence and bright future in Harvard Law School, he is not concerned with titles and worldly possessions. He is not afraid to venture to new places, but despite his apparent reverence for the Earth, he underestimates the power of nature, a power which eventually kills him. Trained as a journalist, Danny O'Brien (*Silver City*) is inquisitive, persistent, and stubborn. He is not necessarily the most ethical person and uses manipulative tactics in his investigation, but he wants to do the right thing when he realizes the environmental danger behind the Bentel Corporation's actions.

There are three films—*The Day After Tomorrow*, *Fast Food Nation*, and *The Simpson's Movie*—that have multiple main characters, indicating that the films follows more than one storyline or subplot. In *The Day After Tomorrow*, the protagonists are father and son Jack and Sam Hall. Jack is a brilliant climatologist, who persistently tries to warn political leaders about the potential dangers of climate change. He is dedicated to his job, but shows his dedication to his family when he travels from Washington, D.C., to New York in the storm to rescue Sam. Sam is Jack's 17-year-old son, who is intelligent, courageous, and a natural-born leader, much like his father. Similarly, there are multiple storylines with multiple characters occurring in *Fast Food Nation*. However, there are three characters whom the environmental issue seems to affect the most. Don Anderson is vice president of marketing for Mickey's Fast Food restaurant chain. He is good at his job and seems unaffected about the unnatural ingredients that go into Mickey's products. He does have a conscience, though, and wants to do the right thing, especially after he finds out about the working conditions in the meat packing plant. He is concerned about the treatment of workers and the safety of the food Mickey's serves. He becomes

disenchanted with his job as he discovers that no one but him cares about food and worker safety if it will decrease productivity. Amber is a Mickey's restaurant employee who is intelligent, hardworking, and dreams of becoming a doctor. She also wants to do the right thing and joins a local environmental group. She is one of the more proactive members, cutting a fence to a cattle pen so that cows destined for slaughter can escape. Sylvia is a Mexican migrant worker looking for a better life with her husband in America. She is forced to juggle her personal morals with supporting her family. Ultimately she makes huge personal sacrifices to make ends meet. In *The Simpson's Movie*, Homer Simpson starts off as an antagonist, very ignorant and uncaring about how his actions affect the environment. He is irresponsible and childish, but eventually, his personality changes to a caring father who needs to rescue his family and friends. Homer's daughter, Lisa Simpson, is intelligent, passionate, and cares very deeply for the environment. She is devastated when she finds out it was Homer who dumped the pig waste in the lake, especially after all her hard work to clean it. The matriarch of the family, Marge Simpson, is the one voice of reason in the Simpson family and bands the family together on their return to Springfield.

To summarize, all of the main characters were heroes for the environment. In the case of *Fast Food Nation* and *The Simpson's Movie*, the main characters, Don and Homer, eventually became heroes for the environment. All of them, are moved to improve or change for the betterment of the environment over the course of the film.

Setting - Time Period and Geographic Location

Half of the films take place during a specific time period; that is, it is specifically stated when the film takes place. *Avatar* and *Wall-E* take place in the years 2154 and

2805, respectively. These two films express the futuristic time period by featuring advanced and innovative technology, such as the avatar bodies and the mental link capsules in *Avatar* and the robots in *Wall-E*. *Two Brothers*, the film about two tiger brothers who are torn apart by human exploration of the Southeast Asian jungle, takes place at the turn of the 20th century. *Silver City*, about a conservative gubernatorial candidate and the scandal surrounding his political campaign, takes place in October and early November, 2004, around the same time as the 2004 U.S. presidential election. *Erin Brockovich* and *Into the Wild*, films based on true stories, took place in the early 1990s.

The time period of the remaining six films (*Evan Almighty*, *The Day After Tomorrow*, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *Fast Food Nation*, *The Simpson's Movie*, and *Happy Feet*) did not mention a specific date or year the films took place, so they have been categorized as taking place in the present day.

Most of the films analyzed for this study were released in the second half of the past decade, indicating that there has been an upswing in environmentally themed films released in the past five years and perhaps even a change in the collective ideology about the environment in Hollywood. Four of the films were released in 2007, which is the most of the ten-year time period analyzed in this study. However, one of those four films, *There Will Be Blood*, was excluded from analysis, as was *Syriana*, the one film released in 2005.

The geographic locations of all of the films range from large cities and developing suburbs to untouched wilderness and even outer space. The films that took place in large cities, however, always had suburban setting, as well. While some scenes in *Evan Almighty* take place in Washington, D.C., the majority of scenes take place near Evan's

home in the Virginia suburbs. *The Day After Tomorrow* largely followed Jack, who lives and works in Washington, D.C., through desolate towns along the eastern seaboard, in addition to following Sam, who was tucked away in the New York Public Library. One of the spheres in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* is placed in Central Park to destroy New York City, but most of the film takes places outside of the city in New Jersey. While Erin lives and works in Los Angeles in *Erin Brockovich*, the majority of the scenes and the location of the main environmental issue take place in the small Southern California town, Hinkley.

The remainder of the films take place in either suburban towns—like Cody, Colorado, in *Fast Food Nation*, Springfield in *The Simpson's Movie*, and Silver City, Colorado, in *Silver City*—or in very isolated, rural locations, such as the rainforest in *Avatar*, the Alaskan wilderness and American west in *Into the Wild*, the jungles of Southeast Asia in *Two Brothers*, the Antarctic tundra in *Happy Feet*, and as isolated as outer space in *Wall-E*.

Representations of the Villain

After watching the films, it became apparent that the villain in the story is not necessarily “evil,” as a typical villain in a Hollywood blockbuster would be defined—as an individual set on destruction for his or her own gain (Lawrence, 2006) or someone who is evil to the core (Riegler, 2010). Rather, for the purpose of this study, the villain is defined as the individual or individuals who impede the progress of the main character. Below is the breakdown of types of villains in the films.

Table 2. Breakdown of types of villains in each film

	<i>Erin Brockovich</i>	<i>Silver City</i>	<i>The Day After Tomorrow</i>	<i>Two Brothers</i>	<i>Fast Food Nation</i>	<i>Happy Feet</i>	<i>Evan Almighty</i>	<i>Into the Wild</i>	<i>The Simpson's Movie</i>	<i>The Day the Earth Stood Still</i>	<i>Wall-E</i>	<i>Avatar</i>
Corporations	•				•						•	•
Military										•		
Individuals		•	•				•	•				
Government									•	•		
Human Race				•		•		•				

Four films (*Erin Brockovich*, *Wall-E*, *Fast Food Nation*, and *Avatar*) had villains who were not individuals, but corporations. In *Erin Brockovich*, Pacific Gas & Electric is a utility company that has its headquarters in a small California town north east of Los Angeles. PG&E puts its profits above worker and customer safety by not providing appropriate equipment to workers, dumping toxic chemicals, manipulating Hinkley residents into selling their homes for a roadway, and lying to Hinkley residents about the type of toxic chemicals it is dumping. A large and financially powerful company, it tries to buy off residents, doctors, and water inspectors who might uncover their irresponsible business practices.

The mega-corporation Buy N Large in *Wall-E* is responsible for providing the products that resulted in mass consumerism and ultimately, the trash covering the Earth. The CEO of BnL is represented as the leader of the country when we see him standing in front of a podium similar to U.S. presidential White House press conferences. The seal on the podium says “Global CEO of Buy N Large,” the seal on the background curtain says “Buy N Large Corporate Headquarters,” and the CEO himself is referred to as “Mr.

President.” Every product is manufactured by BnL and every billboard is an advertisement for a BnL product, including a giant billboard on the moon announcing the upcoming construction of a new outlet mall. After the mission to clean up Earth failed, BnL decided that humans would just stay in outer space; and Wall-E is forgotten, left to clean up the Earth on his own. Aboard the *Axiom*, BnL is still advertising its products and brainwashing babies with a monotone robotic teacher telling babies “B is for Buy N Large. Your very best friend.”

Fast Food Nation has two corporations that represent the villain; Mickeys, a fast food hamburger chain, and Uniglobe Meat Packing. Mickeys is a very successful international food chain, with new food choices that are ever increasing in size and a marketing campaign aimed at young children. Reports that its burger meat contains fecal matter are dismissed by one meat supplier, who insists that the burgers just need to be cooked. Mickeys is also responsible for mass consumerism, conveyed in a scene at the end of the film; when two young boys arrive in America from Mexico, the first thing they are presented with is a Mickeys kid’s meals. Mickeys’ meat supplier, Uniglobe Meat Packing, treats its workers, who are mostly Mexicans looking for work in the U.S., very poorly. There is no oversight in the factory, the upper management takes advantage of workers and it tries to run ranchers who will not work with them out of business.

In *Avatar*, the military personnel are the most-villainous characters in the story, but they are hired by the mining company, and thus considered part of the corporation. The mining company is greedy, self-interested and feels entitled to take whatever it wants. In *Avatar*, the head of the mining program on Pandora is more concerned with profits than the well being of the Na’vi. He is disrespectful toward the Na’vi by sending

bulldozers to unnecessarily destroy the landscape and does not have a problem ordering the colonel to destroy the tribe's village. The colonel in charge of security for the mining company is imperialistic, egotistical, and lacks all respect for the Na'vi. He seems to relish the idea of a preemptive attack on the Na'vi that would destroy their holy place and kill thousands.

In five films—*Evan Almighty*, *The Day After Tomorrow*, *The Simpson's Movie*, *Silver City*, and *Into the Wild*—specific individuals are represented as the villain. Congressman Long, the antagonist in *Evan Almighty*, is contemptible of the environment and animals, greedy, in favor of development of public lands, and makes it a personal mission to pass a bill that will allow development of national parks. U.S. Vice President Becker in *The Day After Tomorrow* represents climate change skeptics. At a climate conference, he argues with Jack that the economy is more fragile and more of a concern than climate change and ignores Jack's argument that drastic changes in weather patterns will have catastrophic effects on the planet. The vice president is skeptical, anti-environment, disrespectful towards Jack, ignorant of scientific climate change evidence, and arrogant. Two individuals are villains in *Silver City*: Chuck Raven, Dickie's campaign manager, and Wes Benteen, the owner of a multi-billion dollar corporation. Chuck is greedy, manipulative, arrogant, and disrespectful—common, if not stereotypical, characteristics of a political strategist. Wes is also greedy and manipulative, pro-development, and uses Dickie as a pawn to further his own agenda in the Colorado government. The villains in *Into the Wild* are best represented by Chris' parents. They are argumentative, stifling, and controlling of Chris, and are the main reason why he decided to travel out west.

In two films—*The Day the Earth Stood Still* and *The Simpson's Movie*—the villain is represented by the government, in the case of both of these films, the U.S. government. In *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, the government is imperialistic, militaristic, selfish, and untrusting. The government resorts immediately to using its military might against the aliens, even before knowing their purpose on Earth. In *The Simpson's Movie*, the Environmental Protection Agency, which ordinarily does not carry out enforcement by sending out agents to arrest people, is over-zealous in its enforcement tactics, maniacal, resorts to unorthodox practices, and refuses to accept defeat.

In three films—*Happy Feet*, *Two Brothers*, and *Into the Wild*—the villain is represented by the whole human race. In *Happy Feet*, the humans are called a variety of names, including “aliens” by one of the falcons and “annihilators” by one of the elephant seals. They are greedy, as conveyed by the huge amounts of fish they take, and indifferent to the plight of the penguins and other animals living in Antarctica. Some humans have total disrespect for the penguins, referring to them as “just birds.” Some humans in the film, however, do have redeeming qualities and fight to protect the penguin habitat. The humans in *Two Brothers* are destructive, greedy, disrespectful, imperialistic, consumptive, arrogant, and think they are masters of nature. In *Into the Wild*, the representation of society as the villain is very subtle, but Chris’ anxiety and frustration with life are most apparent when he is thrust back into society. For instance, at one point in the film, Chris finds himself in Los Angeles, but he is so out of place and his expression conveys that he had no idea that parts of the world could be so consumptive and materialistic. Society in *Into the Wild* is more of an invisible villain, but a villain nonetheless, because it impedes Chris’ journey into the Alaskan wilderness.

Typical characteristics of the villain are greedy (especially if the villain was a corporation), indifferent, disrespectful, arrogant, manipulative, and selfish. Greedy was a characteristic that actually occurred in all films except four (*The Day After Tomorrow*, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *Into the Wild*, and *The Simpson's Movie*). The remaining characteristics described above were unique to each film and only appeared as a characteristic once.

Individuals or Groups Affected by the Environmental Issues

The chart below is the breakdown of which characters or group of characters are directly affected by the environmental issue. The main categories are animals, the general human population, individuals, families of the main character, and a specific group in a centralized location. Some films fell into more than one category.

Table 3. Breakdown of groups affected by the environmental issue

	<i>Erin Brockovich</i>	<i>Silver City</i>	<i>The Day After Tomorrow</i>	<i>Two Brothers</i>	<i>Fast Food Nation</i>	<i>Happy Feet</i>	<i>Evan Almighty</i>	<i>Into the Wild</i>	<i>The Simpson's Movie</i>	<i>The Day the Earth Stood Still</i>	<i>Wall-E</i>	<i>Avatar</i>
Animals				•		•						
General Human Population			•							•	•	
Individuals			•				•	•			•	•
Families of Characters							•		•			
Specific Group in Centralized Location	•	•			•				•			•

In *Happy Feet* and *Two Brothers*, the animals that are the main characters are the most directly affected by the environmental issue. The group of emperor penguins is starving because humans are overfishing and leaving very little food for the local

wildlife. Mumble, the outcast penguin, is blamed for the lack of fish because his unique dancing is viewed as blasphemous, but becomes the hero when he realizes the humans are taking all of the fish, and swims after a fishing ship to stop them. The tiger family is separated after the father is killed by treasure hunters when he tries to protect his cub, Kumal, who is then sold to a circus and treated poorly by the circus owners. The mother is hunted for sport, and while she manages to escape the hunters, her other cub, Sangha, is given to a French ambassador's son. While Sangha becomes a beloved pet to the boy, he is blamed for abusing the family dog and destroying the house, and is sold, oddly enough, to the aristocrat who tried to kill his mother. The two tiger brothers are treated like commodities and forced to fight each other for the entertainment of the humans.

In several of the films, the environmental issues not only affect the main character, but his or her family, as well. In *Evan Almighty*, Evan is the most directly affected by the environmental issue, but so is Evan's family, who thinks he has lost his mind obsessing over building the ark. But they stand by him and help him finish building the ark. In *The Simpson's Movie*, the Simpson's are forced to flee Springfield and go into hiding, after they are wanted by the Environmental Protection Agency and by the residents of Springfield because Homer dumped toxic pig waste into Lake Springfield.

In three films, *The Day After Tomorrow*, *The Day Earth Stood Still*, and *Wall-E*, the general human population is affected by the environmental issues. In *The Day After Tomorrow*, unnatural weather patterns cause havoc on different areas of the planet, and subsequently its human populations, such as tornadoes in Los Angeles and hail storms in Tokyo. Three massive storms cover the northern hemisphere that quickly and unexpectedly puts the planet back into another ice age. In *The Day the Earth Stood Still*,

the entire human race is under threat of annihilation by alien protectors of the Earth who hold humans responsible for destroying nature. Finally, in *Wall-E*, humans are depicted as overweight, lazy, and reliant on technology and BnL Corporation. Humans are responsible for polluting the Earth, then leaving the planet to be cleaned up by BnL's robots. They put their trust completely in BnL and allow the corporation to dictate their daily lives. The humans aboard the *Axiom* have become used to the everyday comforts and commodities provided by BnL. While these individuals are not directly responsible for polluting the Earth, they are content to stay in outer space with the everyday comforts and commodities provided by BnL.

In five films—*Erin Brockovich*, *Silver City*, *Fast Food Nation*, *The Simpson's Movie*, and *Avatar*—the environmental issue affected specific groups of people in a centralized location. In *Erin Brockovich*, the residents of Hinkley, California, have gotten sick with multiple types of chronic illnesses from drinking water contaminated with toxic substances. In *Silver City*, the people living in the vicinity of Silver City, Colorado, will be affected by the eventual development of the land, with the yet unknown contamination of the lake water, and most likely, the groundwater as well. Additionally, Mexican immigrants who work for the Silver City developers are forced to work in mineshafts and agricultural fields for low wages and amid poor treatment. Similarly, the Mexican immigrant workers in *Fast Food Nation* work in sub-standard conditions at the Uniglobe Meatpacking Plant in Cody, Colorado, are taken advantage of by upper management, and given the least-desirable jobs, such as sorting out different parts of the animal and cleaning meat grinders. The residents of Springfield in *The Simpson's Movie* are affected by the environmental issue after the EPA decides the town is the most-

polluted city in the country and places a giant bubble over it, where no one is allowed in or out, so that the pollution stays contained within the town. Finally, the last film that depicts a particular localized group affected by the environmental issue is in *Avatar*, where the Na'vi are driven off their lands so humans can mine a precious metal. The tribe's holy lands are destroyed by bulldozers, its home is destroyed by missiles, and hundreds are killed as the survivors are displaced from their land.

In four films, the environmental issue most directly affects one specific character. In *Evan Almighty*, Evan is commissioned by God to build an ark after he is asked to co-sponsor the Citizen's Integration of Public Lands Act, which would open up parts of national parks for development. He agrees to build the ark and endures public humiliation, being suspended from Congress, and having his family lose faith in him to follow through with God's command. Chris McCandless, the lead character in *Into the Wild*, gives away all of his material possessions and lives very minimally off the land for more than two years. He ventures into the Alaskan wilderness, which has been his ultimate destination and, perhaps as a result of lack of education or lack of respect for the power of nature, dies from starvation. In *Avatar*, Jake initially enters the Na'vi tribe with intentions of getting them to move off the land and sending information back to the human military force. His allegiances change after he learns the ways of the Na'vi, falls in love with Nateri, and is accepted into the tribe. Rather than being the mining company's pawn to move the Na'vi off the land, Jake rallies the people into battle against the humans, who are intent in destroying the Na'vi's home and holy lands. In *The Day After Tomorrow*, although the two main characters are father and son, they follow different story lines, so for the purpose of this study, are considered individuals. Jack

discovers that shifting climate patterns could lead to a new ice age, but is unable to convince world leaders that society must change its consumptive behavior to avoid this occurring sooner than scientists originally predicted. After he discovers that a giant storm will put the northern half of the country into a new ice age, he makes his way to New York from Washington, D.C., in the freezing cold and snow to rescue his son. Sam, following the advice of his father, finds shelter in the New York Public Library with his friends and a group of strangers, working to keep themselves out of the storm and keep warm as the most dangerous part of the storm, the eye, moves over the city.

As all but two of the films had main characters that were humans, it is humans who are most directly affected by the environmental issue, particularly if these humans were located in a specific geographic location.

Response of the Characters to the Environmental Issue

The responses of the characters to the environmental issue have largely been mentioned in previous sections of the results, but a summary of their actions is listed by movie below.

In *Erin Brockovich*, the environmental issue is groundwater contamination. Erin jeopardizes her relationship with her family and her boyfriend to help the residents of Hinkley. She defends the town's rights to the PG&E lawyers and her own bosses. At Erin's urging, Masry decides to turn a real estate deal into a toxic tort case, representing more than 600 plaintiffs.

In *Silver City*, the environmental issues are development, natural resource exploitation, dumping/pollution, working conditions, privatization of public lands, and groundwater contamination. Danny discovers that the Bentel Corporation's mining

operation resulted in contamination of ground water and degradation of the local environment. The corporation has business interests, not only in mining, but in development, as well. Despite heavily contaminated soil and water, Wes Benteen wants to develop the land anyway for a planned community targeted at people who want to live the ideal American life at the foot of the Rocky Mountains. Wes tries to convince Dickie that development is good for people who “get distracted thinking about some postcard idea of the Rockies, some black-footed ferret, some endangered tumbleweed.”

In *Two Brothers*, environmental issues are protection/treatment of animals, development, and natural resource exploitation. The characters who react most visibly to the environmental issues are not the two tiger brothers, but the human characters in the film. Most humans have very low preconceived notions about animals, and go out of their way to drive tigers from the land, claiming they are enemies to man. McCoy wants to do the right thing for the tigers, but even he has no problem paying for a captive older tiger to be killed so the skin can be given to a wealthy aristocrat. The tigers are treated very poorly by the humans, beaten for not complying with the circus owners and by not fighting each other. McCoy and Raul, however, are the only two humans who try to protect the tigers. Sangha and Kumal, despite being treated poorly and having their family torn apart, remember each other from when they cubs and work together to survive out of captivity.

In *The Day After Tomorrow*, the environmental issue is global warming. Despite his pleas with the U.S. vice president to take action regarding the drastic weather changes across the globe, Jack meets resistance from the government, and even after Jack explains the problem to the president and chiefs of staff, the vice president argues that Jack is

blowing the situation out of proportion. Jack makes his way to New York to rescue Sam before the storm hits, while Sam, following the advice of his father, leads a small group of people finding shelter in the New York Public Library. Eventually, after the storm has struck and changed the landscape of Earth's northern hemisphere, the skeptical former vice president realizes Jack was right, and now as president, has a change of heart, stating in a public address:

“These past few weeks have left us all with a profound sense of humility in the face of nature's destructive power. For years, we operated under the belief that we could continue consuming our planet's natural resources without consequence. We were wrong. I was wrong.”

In *Fast Food Nation*, the environmental issues are protection/treatment of animals, consumption, development, exploitation of natural resources, dumping/pollution, and working conditions. Don's attitude about his position at Mickeys completely changes upon his investigation into the treatment of both animals and workers at the Uniglobe Meatpacking Plant. While eating dinner at Mickeys restaurant, he hesitates before eating a burger he helped create. His pleas that the meat packing plant is corrupt and unethical, however, fall on deaf ears. Meanwhile, Amber's mom, who works at a pet store, talks about setting all the puppies free because they are kept in barely big enough cages; this notion seemingly inspires Amber to suggest cutting the fences to the cattle pens when she joins the environmental group. Her uncle jokes that he cannot look at her in a Mickeys uniform, saying “the first one didn't bother me, it's just the 400th.” Sylvia quits her job at the meat packing plant because she claims that the managers are unethical and taking advantage of desperate people looking for jobs.

In *Happy Feet*, the environmental issue is overfishing. After becoming suspicious that the penguin's food shortage might be caused by humans (who all the Antarctic

animals call “aliens”), Mumble goes on a mission to try to negotiate with humans to stop taking the fish. He wins the hearts of the people in the zoo and is released back into the wild with a tracking beacon fastened to his back. The beacon leads a group of scientists to the penguin habitat where they see them dancing, and are so charmed by the animals, that they try to convince lawmakers to protect the penguin habitat and make it illegal to fish in Antarctic waters.

In *Evan Almighty*, the environmental issues are consumption of goods/materials, development, protection/treatment of animals, and privatization of public lands. Evan goes on a journey through the film, starting off obsessed with material possessions and image, driving a Hummer, choosing old growth Brazilian cherry hardwood cabinets for his mansion solely because it is old and because he is “not sensitive to that ‘save the rainforest’ stuff,” and is upset that the delivery of wood planks for the ark is going to leave a brown patch on his lawn. As he begins to build the ark, however, he begins to realize that material possessions and image are not important to leading a happy life, and he becomes a makeshift religious prophet. When he confronts Congressman Long about the land act bill, Evan tells him he is greedy and willing to trade protection of nature for his own profit.

In *Into the Wild*, the environmental issue is appreciation of nature. Chris learns to farm, hunt, cook, and identify edible plants and berries in preparation for this journey to Alaska. When he arrives, he marvels at the snow-covered mountains and wilderness surrounding him. Despite his lack of food, he finds himself unable to kill a caribou when he realizes the caribou is nursing a calf.

In *The Simpson’s Movie*, the environmental issues are protection/treatment of

animals, consumption of goods/materials, natural resource exploitation, and dumping/pollution. In the opening credits, the rock band Green Day is playing a concert on a barge when the lead singer stops to say he wants to take a minute to say a word about the environment; it turns out what he would like to say is that the toxic water is eating through the stage. To win Lisa's affections, Milhouse says he'll support her cleanup of the lake, but then says global warming is a myth so he does not get beat up by Nelson. Homer saves a pig from being slaughtered, but pulls its tail and dresses it up for his own amusement. The mayor of Springfield listens to Lisa's pleas and makes it illegal to dump anything in the lake. The whole town works together to clean up the pollution, except Homer who dumps all of the waste from his pet pig in the lake because it is more convenient for him. The EPA responds to the toxic dump by sealing the town in a giant bubble, claiming it is an act to "kick some ass for Mother Earth." It then attempts to deal with Springfield by blowing it up and promoting it as the "new Grand Canyon." When the Simpsons flee to Alaska, they are at first shocked to see hundreds of oil rigs dotting the landscape, but then receive \$1,000 provided as compensation to allow oil companies to "ravage [the] state's natural beauty." The family then returns to Springfield to try to make things right, and succeed in destroying the bubble.

In *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, the environmental issues are protection/treatment of animals, consumption of goods/materials, development, and natural resource exploitation. While the audience does not see any physical images of these issues taking place during the film, it is discussed in the film's dialogue as the reasons behind Klaatu coming to Earth to destroy the human race. Klaatu calls himself a friend of Earth, and is dedicated to protecting it. He sends out spheres all over the planet

to protect animals from the weapon that will destroy the human race. It takes a great deal of convincing on Helen's part to persuade him not to destroy the human race. A colleague of hers tries to explain to Klaatu that only on the brink of destruction, can a species evolve and change. Eventually, he is persuaded, but sets off a magnetic pulse that destroys everything with an electric current, offering the human race a chance to start again without relying on technology.

In *Wall-E*, the environmental issues are consumption of goods/materials, natural resource exploitation, and dumping/pollution. Wall-E works tirelessly cleaning up trash on Earth generated by humans (but it is his job and he enjoys it, collecting keepsakes of junk along the way). When Wall-E follows EVE to the *Axiom*, he is overwhelmed by the lights, technology, and fast-paced environment. Humans travel around all day on hovercrafts with a video screen shielding the view of their surroundings. When Wall-E knocks out the video feed of two hovercrafts, the man and woman riding it notice for the first time everything surrounding them. The two eventually fall in love, brought together by Wall-E's innocent negligence. Wall-E inspires many of the robots on the *Axiom* to break away from their duties of serving the humans. After the captain of the *Axiom* learned that plant life has been found on Earth, he stays up all night learning everything he can about the planet, including facts about farming, the ocean, and even dancing. The captain is very disappointed when he sees that Earth is barren with no vegetation, and vows to go back to Earth to replant and recolonize. The people on the *Axiom* cheer on the captain as he wrestles for control of the ship with Auto. Eventually the captain prevails, and the *Axiom* returns to Earth, where the captain shows everyone how to farm and take care of plants.

In *Avatar*, the environmental issue is natural resource exploitation. The Na'vi understands the energy and balance of the land. They bond with the animals through physical connection called a "halo" between their long hair and the animal. The Na'vi worships a deity that is "made up of all living things." Jake learns about this connection from Nateri, commenting that "she's always going on about the flow of energy, the spirits of animals." Jake is unsuccessful at getting the Na'vi to move off the land before the humans arrive to destroy it, which results in hundreds of Na'vi being killed. Guilt-ridden, Jake tries to make up to the people by rallying all the tribes of the Na'vi in a battle against the humans. He is successful and the humans are driven off Pandora permanently.

Filming Techniques

Aside from plot lines and character dialogue, filming techniques can convey a great deal about the subtext of a film and also illicit a certain response from the audience. The strategic use of camera movements, camera angles, camera lenses and sound in the films not only had significance in moving the plot along, but also portrayed the environmental theme of the film in a particular context.

Seven films (*The Day After Tomorrow*, *Happy Feet*, *Wall-E*, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *Into the Wild*, *Avatar*, and *Evan Almighty*) open with panning shots across the landscape. Of these, *Wall-E*, *Happy Feet*, and *The Day the Earth Stood Still* begin in outer space and zoom down onto the surface of the Earth. *Evan Almighty* is the only film that has a panning shot across a developed landscape; the remaining six films have panning shots across an isolated wilderness.

Two Brothers and *Happy Feet* contain a great deal of following shots, in which

the camera follows the animal as if it is filming from the animal's point of view. *Wall-E* contains following shots that show sweeping vistas of the landscape, specifically when EVE flies around the city upon her arrival on Earth and when she and Wall-E are “dancing” in outer space after Wall-E saves the plant. Additionally, in *Two Brothers*, the use of tiger sounds and noises conveys that the tigers are actually communicating with each other. The audience can tell when the tigers are happy, sad, angry, or playful.

Seven of the films—*Evan Almighty*, *The Day After Tomorrow*, *Wall-E*, *Into the Wild*, *Happy Feet*, *The Day The Earth Stood Still*, and *Avatar*—used wide-angle landscape shots throughout a majority of the film, especially in instances where wilderness was the topic of discussion in the dialogue. *Evan Almighty*, *The Day After Tomorrow*, *Wall-E*, and *Into the Wild* primarily use short lenses in the wide-angle shots, meaning that everything on screen is in focus. *Avatar* employs a sequence of short-lens, wide-angle shots, followed by shots in which only the object in the foreground, usually a character or the unique flora and fauna of Pandora, is in focus. *Happy Feet* and *The Day The Earth Stood Still* employ the use of long lenses in its wide-angle shots. Usually, a long-lens is used to set sharp focus on a particular character or object, which draws the audience's attention to the foreground. In all of these films, people, cars, houses, and cities are significantly smaller compared to clouds, tornadoes, mountains, and animals, which helps to convey the grandeur of nature and shows the scale of nature against man-made materials.

Wall-E perhaps utilizes the most filming techniques to convey messages about the environment. The use of wide-angle, in-focus landscape, and tracking shots has already been discussed, but the film uses other filming techniques, such as color and sound.

- The film opens with the very light-hearted song, “Put On Your Sunday Clothes,” from the musical *Hello, Dolly*. The images corresponding to this song are first majestic shots of various constellations and galaxies, then ends with a shot of the brown-tinted Earth.
- The color of Earth from outer space is a very dingy brown, but upon zooming into Earth in the opening shot, the audience realizes the color is due to the thousands of defunct satellites surrounding the planet.
- When Wall-E and EVE are flying through space, and subsequently falling in love, the scenes are accompanied by light-hearted and romantic music.
- The use of sound is also utilized when the spaceship carrying EVE and Wall-E to the *Axiom* breaks through the field of satellites on a dramatic and climactic musical chord.
- When the plant is thrown in the garbage shoot, before the audiences discovers Wall-E was hiding and the plant landed on his head, the plant looks like it is growing out of the trash, which could represent the potential for new life on a trash-covered Earth.
- Finally, the film ends the opposite way it began, with the camera moving out from the Earth’s surface—which is now dotted with green, growing plants—into outer space. The film began zooming in over a desolate and barren landscape, but ended zooming out over a new and rejuvenated landscape.

Fast Food Nation is the only film that does not employ the use of wide-angle landscape shots. Instead, this film contains very tightly shot sequences, which put everything on screen into sharp detail. The film opens with a shot of a man carrying a

hamburger value meal through a crowded fast food restaurant, ending on a tight shot of a poorly constructed greasy hamburger. Additionally, like many of the other films that employ the use of moving shots, there are brief sequences in which moving shots of fast food chain store signs are cross-dissolved (that is, one shot fades out while a second fades in, but the audience will see both shots). Lastly, the film contains a very graphic sequence depicting how cows are slaughtered.

The only notable filming technique used in *Silver City* comes at the very end of the film, which starts as a close-up shot, followed up a sequence of shots that gets steadily further and further away, showing hundreds of dead fish rising to the surface of the lake, while “America the Beautiful” plays in the background. The meaning of this particularly poignant scene will be discussed in the next section.

The only two films that did not have any discernable filming techniques that added to the framing of the environmental issue were *Erin Brockovich* and *The Simpson’s Movie*.

Finally, only *Two Brothers* concludes with a call to action to help save the world’s tiger population: “It is up to us, the tiger’s deadliest enemy, to ensure the survival of the greatest of the great cats, and last lord of the jungle.”

Environmentally Friendly Actions by the Characters

The Environmental Media Association has an online resource list available to screenwriters on how they may incorporate environmental actions into the everyday actions of their characters. This list was used to support the coding category, “Environmentally Friendly Actions on the Part of the Characters.” The list is available in Appendix A. The chart below identifies the major themes that emerged in this coding

category and which films contained those themes.

Table 4. Theme breakdown of environmentally friendly actions by the characters

	<i>Erin Brockovich</i>	<i>Silver City</i>	<i>The Day After Tomorrow</i>	<i>Two Brothers</i>	<i>Fast Food Nation</i>	<i>Happy Feet</i>	<i>Evan Almighty</i>	<i>Into the Wild</i>	<i>The Simpson's Movie</i>	<i>The Day the Earth Stood Still</i>	<i>Wall-E</i>	<i>Avatar</i>
Science Lessons	•	•	•	•		•	•					
Protecting Animals				•		•	•			•	•	
Showing Reverence for Nature							•	•		•		•
Driving Fuel-efficient Vehicles			•						•	•		
Foregoing Use of Technology							•	•				•
Consuming Locally Grown Foods		•			•			•				
Appealing to Others to Protect Nature				•		•			•			
Cleaning up Polluted Areas									•		•	
Using Energy-saving Laptops					•		•					
Living Sustainably Off the Land								•				•
Other		•									•	

In general, all of the films had characters taking part in some action that is considered environmentally friendly. The most frequently occurring theme was the inclusion of a science lesson that explains a complex idea to the audience in the form of dialogue. These instances were:

- Jack trying to explain how weather patterns, global warming, and ocean currents can result in a new ice age in *The Day After Tomorrow*.
- Evan's son spouting off facts about animals that he learned by watching Animal Planet in *Evan Almighty*.
- A UCLA scientist explaining why chromium-laced water is used to cool reactors in power plants, and the difference between toxic and non-toxic types of

chromium in *Erin Brockovich*.

- The mating behavior of tigers and text at the end of the film stating how many tigers are left in the wild in *Two Brothers*.
- The mating behavior of penguins (particularly how the male penguin protects the egg while the female penguin goes off to fish) and the hunting behavior of different types of sea animals in *Happy Feet*.
- A former mining engineer explaining how a gold-mining operation works in *Silver City*.

The other themes that emerged in this category are explained below.

Protecting animals: The spheres that touch down around the planet collect animals for protection when the alien weapon will ultimately exterminate the human race in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. Similarly, Evan builds the ark to hold two of every animal in *Evan Almighty*, so that when the flood subsides, the animals will continue to populate the Earth. Wall-E saves the life of a pet bug numerous times in *Wall-E*, Raul pleads with the humans to stop the pursuit of the wild tigers in *Two Brothers*, and scientists and lawmakers draft legislation to protect the Antarctic penguin habitat in *Happy Feet*.

Showing reverence for nature: God shows Evan how important it is to have respect and reverence for nature, and refers to a stand of trees as “old friends” in *Evan Almighty*. Chris’s mission of living a minimalist life in *Into the Wild* results in his appreciation of nature and his awe of the Alaskan wilderness. In *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, Klaatu is very philosophical about the balance of nature, stating “nothing ever truly dies: the universe wastes nothing. Everything is simply transformed.” The Na’vi in *Avatar* base

their entire spiritual beliefs on nature, revering two old and sacred trees where the tribe prays to their ancestors and connects to their God. They find sanctuary among trees, physically and mentally connect to animals, and understand the flow of energy through all living things.

Driving fuel-efficient vehicles: Jack in *The Day After Tomorrow* and EPA agents in *The Simpson's Movie*, drive electric or hybrid-electric vehicles. Helen in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* drives a fuel-efficient Honda Accord, but it is not known if it is a hybrid car or not.

Foregoing the use of technology: In *Evan Almighty*, Evan uses very rudimentary and ancient tools, rather than power tools, to build the ark. Chris relishes living without technological comforts, like cars and electricity, in *Into the Wild*. The Na'vi in *Avatar* have managed to live on Pandora for thousands of years with what would be considered ancient weaponry, but they have mastered utilizing what the forest has to provide without damaging the natural resources.

Consuming locally grown and organic foods: In *Fast Food Nation*, everyone in Cody, Colorado, drinks a locally brewed beer, Fat Tire. One of the characters in *Silver City* who is a chef says he only uses free-range beef and chicken and organic foods in his recipes. In *Into the Wild*, Chris relishes eating an apple and talks to himself about how it is juicy, delicious, and most importantly, organic.

Appealing to others to protect nature: In *Two Brothers*, Raul tries to convince the hunters that humans and tigers can co-exist, as long as they respect each other and each other's territory. After seeing the penguins dance and sharing the video with the human population, scientists and lawmakers in *Happy Feet* try and succeed to pass legislation

banning fishing in Antarctic waters and protecting penguin habitat. In *The Simpson's Movie*, Lisa goes door to door trying to get signatures on a petition to clean up Lake Springfield and makes a presentation at a town hall meeting urging the citizens and the mayor to pass legislation that would ban dumping trash in the lake.

Cleaning up polluted areas: Wall-E's sole job is to compact and clean up the trash left on Earth by humans in *Wall-E*. The people of Springfield band together to clean up the lake in *The Simpson's Movie*.

The use of energy-saving laptops: Evan uses a laptop to look up information on building arks in *Evan Almighty*, and Don's wife uses a laptop to shop online in *Fast Food Nation*.

Living sustainably off of the land: In *Into the Wild*, Chris spends three months in Alaska, bringing very little equipment with him and getting sustenance from berries, fruits, and the occasional squirrel. In *Avatar*, the Na'vi have lived off the land for generations and have learned how to provide for the tribe, taking only what they need and respecting the balance of nature.

Other: The list above identifies and explains themes that emerged in multiple films. Other environmentally friendly actions that occurred in individual films include Wall-E using a solar array to charge his internal battery, the captain of the *Axiom* giving the plant water in *Wall-E* and later explaining to humans how to take care of the plant, Evan sharing his lunch with the animals in *Evan Almighty*, and a reporter drinking out of a stainless steel coffee mug in *Silver City*.

Chapter 6. Discussion

This chapter will provide analysis of the results and the potential implications of the films on the audience. It will also discuss different ways in which the films were framed in order to strengthen the environmental message and provide ways in which these films can be used by educators and environmental organizations to teach and communicate environmental messages to various audiences. First, answers to the research questions are presented below.

RQ1 What themes are present that identify the films as “environmental?”

That is, do they address certain issues that are related to the environment (i.e., global warming, natural resource destruction, water pollution, etc...)?

All 12 of the films had prominent environmental themes, with plotlines that revolved around those themes. The three most frequently occurring environmental themes in all of the films were protection/treatment of animals, natural resource exploitation, and dumping/pollution. Interestingly enough, despite the prevalence of protection/treatment of animals across the films, there were only two films—*Two Brothers* and *Happy Feet*—in which the animal groups most directly affected were also the primary characters. This could be due to the fact that audiences would better relate to how human characters react to the protection and treatment of animals, thus portray the theme reflective of how humans respond to the issue. However, Shanahan and McComas (1997) found that audiences react to the protection and treatment of animals more

positively when the main characters are animals, presumably because animals are usually portrayed with human characteristics. If that is the case, then only *Two Brothers* and *Happy Feet* capitalized on this ideology.

Silver City and *Fast Food Nation* each had five environmental themes found within the film's plot, the most out of all 12 films. *Evan Almighty*, *The Simpson's Movie* and *The Day the Earth Stood Still* had four themes; *Erin Brockovich*, *Two Brothers*, *Happy Feet*, and *Wall-E* had three themes; and *The Day After Tomorrow*, *Into the Wild*, and *Avatar* each had one theme. *The Day After Tomorrow* and *Avatar*, the two highest grossing films in this analysis (\$544,272,402 and \$2,782,612,870, respectively, worldwide), only had one environmental theme; however, that is not to say the filmmakers did not take advantage of capitalizing on the environmental issue. The revenue generated by each of these films indicates that they were seen by a vast number of people. The prevalence of the environmental theme (global warming in *The Day After Tomorrow* and natural resource exploitation in *Avatar*) can be found from the beginning of the film to the end. Despite that these two films might have only explored one environmental issue, they both revolved the entire plot around that issue.

In all the films the individuals responsible for environmental degradation are humans. This might be the filmmakers' way of saying that humans are solely responsible for creating environmental problems. In some cases, however, they also argue that humans can fix the problem. In eight films—*Two Brothers*, *The Day After Tomorrow*, *Fast Food Nation*, *Happy Feet*, *The Simpson's Movie*, *Evan Almighty*, *The Day After Tomorrow*, and *Avatar*—the human character have a change of heart about the environmental issue. This is leading the audience to believe that humans, while

responsible for environmental degradation, have the power to do the right thing and help protect the environment.

RQ2 What environmental issues are prevalent in the films analyzed for this study and how are those issues presented in the film?

The three most prevalent environmental themes in the 12 films are protection/treatment of animals, natural resource exploitation, and dumping/pollution. It can be argued that these three issues are reflective of the major environmental issues prevalent in society today. In some of the films, the three issues listed above are presented more subtly and are a result of a larger, more-prominent environmental issue. For example in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, protection of animals is Klaatu's response to humans being consumptive and exploiting Earth's natural resources. While the issues might be presented more subtly, that does not mean they will not resonate or have an effect on the audience.

While the additional eight environmental themes may not appear as prevalently in the films, that does not necessarily mean they are not any less important in society. As stated above, simply because a film only discusses one environmental theme does mean it does not capitalize on discussing that theme throughout the story. On the contrary, because certain films only discuss a limited number of environmental themes, it gives the filmmaker a chance to explore the issue more thoroughly.

It is surprising that themes like global warming, overfishing, and groundwater contamination are explored in only one film each (*The Day After Tomorrow*, *Happy Feet*, and *Erin Brockovich*, respectively), as these three particular issues are heavily debated in society today, and in the case of groundwater contamination, often the reason behind

lawsuits.⁸ This could be due to the fact that it is scientifically difficult to determine the affects of global warming, the amount of fish left in the ocean, or who is responsible for groundwater contamination. In other words, it is a topic that might be difficult to explain to those who do not have a scientific background. Perhaps because an issue like global warming is found in only one film indicates that the filmmakers themselves simply do not have enough knowledge about the issue to produce a realistic, educational film.

A discussion of how the environmental issue is presented in each film is provided below.

Erin Brockovich

This film is based on a true story, so it is difficult for the filmmakers to portray the environmental issue any other way, since the situation has happened in real life. However, this makes it much easier to convey why the issue of groundwater contamination is an important environmental concern. While the filmmakers could not do much in terms of personalities of the characters, geographic location, or time period, simply getting the story and resulting environmental messages out to the public is a way to inform the public on the dangers of groundwater contamination.

Silver City

Dickie Pilager bears a striking resemblance to former president George W. Bush; President Bush was heavily criticized as being too inept and unintelligent to run the country, and many American citizens believed he was just a pawn used by big corporations with interests in oil and development. President Bush was also famous, or perhaps infamous, for his anti-environment policies (Cook, 2001; Toner, 2001; Wintour

⁸Based on an Academic Search Premiere query of environmental tort lawsuits.

& Brown, 2003). Basing a character like Dickie Pilager to George W. Bush certainly sends a clear message of what the filmmakers thought about the former president and his policies on not only the environment, but mining, development, and freedom of speech.

Additionally, Dickie's name also presents that particular character in a negative light. First, a grown man going by the name Dickie makes him seem juvenile and childish. As the audience finds out, Dickie is easily manipulated and has difficult time thinking for himself, which are characteristics of a child. Second, his surname "Pilager" is derived from the word "pillaging," which means to plunder or strip ruthlessly. In the film, Dickie's family is in the mining business, and its mining operation has turned Silver City into "a pile of trash rock." The deliberate use of the surname "Pilager" conveys the type of background Dickie came from and what he stands for in the film.

A particularly poignant scene was mentioned previously in the results section. The closing scene of *Silver City* is a sequenced shot of hundreds of dead fish rapidly rising to the surface of the lake, while "America the Beautiful" plays in the background. The intent of this scene is to have a profound and hopefully lasting effect on the audience. One dead fish might be upsetting, but it is not as dramatic or disturbing as hundreds of dead fish rising simultaneously to the surface of the lake. The use of the song "America the Beautiful" is meant to be ironic, as it is difficult to find the beauty in this particular scene. The sarcasm is palpable, as it implies that the American dream, which encourages people to make their own fortune and live prosperous lives, has backfired on the American public, now with only a small number of individuals living economically prosperous lives while middle class, and particularly, lower class individuals suffer all the consequences. Dickie and Wes represent that smaller

percentage of upper-class Americans.

The Day After Tomorrow

The Day After Tomorrow received a great deal of criticism that it was too unrealistic. However, blowing the situation out of proportion and turning the film into an action/disaster film helps emphasize the point that humans have no idea what the consequences of global warming are, and probably will never know until it is too late. However, despite the unlikely occurrence of a new ice age forming within two days, the film does utilize the tactic of including science lessons. There are several in this film, including Jack explaining how global warming can actually result in an ice age:

“The Northern Hemisphere owes its temperate climate to the North Atlantic current. Heat from the sun arrives at the equator and is carried North by the ocean. But global warming is melting the polar ice caps and disrupting this flow. Eventually it will shut down and when that occurs, there goes our warm climate.”

Additionally, as temperatures in the northern hemisphere start dropping and the three huge storms are starting to form, Jack also explains how global warming, melting polar ice caps, ocean currents and weather patterns are all related:

“The current depends on a delicate balance of salt and fresh water... no one has taken into account how much freshwater has been dumped into the ocean because of melting polar ice. I think we've researched a critical salinization point.”

Presenting this information in the form of dialogue does not necessarily answer all the questions about global warming, but does help explain it in simple terms, something it seems scientists and politicians have been arguing over for years. Additionally, Jack's occupation as a climatologist increases his credibility and his trustworthiness with the audience.

The change of heart and subsequent admission of regret from the film's main villain, Vice President Becker, is poignantly stated in a speech given by the vice president (who at this point in this film is now the president) mentioned previously in the results section.

“These past few weeks have left us all with a profound sense of humility in the face of nature's destructive power. For years, we operated under the belief that we could continue consuming our planet's natural resources without consequence. We were wrong. I was wrong.”

This short segment of the Becker's speech seems to foreshadow what skeptics and doubters of global warming will be saying should they themselves ever have a change of heart.

Two Brothers

Placing the environmental issue in a particular time puts the issue into better context and easier to understand. For example, *Two Brothers* is set in the early 20th century, a time period when exploration and imperialism were at their height. The treatment of the two tigers in the film as commodities reflects a major environmental concern still present today. Poaching is a multi-million dollar market, especially of endangered animals or animals whose body parts fetch a high price for medicinal purposes (Chapron et al., 2008; Kessler, 2009; Messer, 2010; The Economist, 2010). Poaching, therefore, would be a significant environmental theme that could fit in any period of time, but placing *Two Brothers* at the turn of the 20th century, coinciding with the exploration of Asia, puts species exploitation in better perspective and context.

In the two films with animals as the main characters, *Happy Feet* and *Two Brothers*, the villains are humans. This suggests that humans are the enemy of all

animals. While that might not necessarily be true in today's society, it does suggest that the only enemies that animals will face in terms of their survival are humans.

The use of tiger sounds conveys that the tigers are actually communicating and gives them much more human, and thus relatable, characteristics. The film ends with a call to action, suggesting that it is the only one that was made for the purpose of educating and communicating the public about the diminishing tiger population.

Fast Food Nation

The tight-shots and graphic sequences employed in *Fast Food Nation* convey that fast food can be characterized as only one thing: gross and disgusting. The ending sequence of cows being slaughtered is graphic enough to make anyone reconsider their meat-eating habits.

When the two young Mexican boys are presented with a Mickey's kid's meal at the end of the film, this is presumably an act to make them feel welcome and comforted in a new country. The message it conveys, however, is that large fast food corporations like Mickey's are targeting people at increasingly young ages. The intentions of the adult who gave them the kid's meals may be good, but it conveys that fast food is now considered comfort foods and symbols of America.

In the scene that shows how cows are slaughtered, the animals appear to be handled roughly and in distress. Studies have shown that when animals are in distress they release hormones that effectively contaminate the meat (Apple et al., 2005; Hambrecht et al, 2004; Hawaleshka et al., 2004, Micera et al., 2010; Scarth et al, 2009). While this fact is not necessarily conveyed to the audience, it could be a potential talking point for educators or environmental groups using *Fast Food Nation* to discuss not only

the environmental implications of factory farms and cruel treatment to animals destined for slaughter, but also the human health implications from eating factory farm-produced meat.

Happy Feet

While *Happy Feet* does not explore the issue of dumping/pollution to a great extent, it does capitalize on one iconic piece of litter: the plastic six-pack holder. A wise, older penguin named Lovelace has a six-pack holder stuck around his neck, which he claims is a “sacred talisman from mystic beings” and as a result, he is worshiped by the adelic penguins. When Mumble and the amigos find “enough [six-pack holders] for everyone,” Lovelace admits that the holder ended up around his neck while he was swimming and he does not know how to get it off. In this film, the plastic six-pack holder represents all forms of ocean pollution and conveys that dumping trash in the ocean could end up as far away as Antarctica.

The end of *Happy Feet*, when the audience sees a montage of humans arguing about whether to set a protective sanctuary on the penguin habitat, is the filmmaker’s subtle call to action that humans are overfishing and have to do something to stop destruction to animal habitats. It can also be viewed that the few humans who fight on the side of the penguins represent those groups of real humans who fight to protect animals in society today. The fact that the pro-penguin lobbyists win the argument is both a nod to those individuals who fight to protect animals and maybe a way to encourage and bolster their continuous efforts.

The penguins are kept in small confines with imitation snow and landscapes. The plight of the penguins in the zoo is represented by Mumble having hallucinations of his

family and friends back in Antarctica. The fact that Mumble and the other penguins are portrayed in the film as smart, sentient beings sent to live in artificial habitats that results in their going insane suggests that humans vastly underestimate and insult animal intelligence. While it is safe to assume that real penguins do not talk or tap dance as they do in *Happy Feet*, confining them in small cages with limited room to move around and on display for human entertainment shows arrogance and disrespect for animals.

Evan Almighty

Though he does have morals and good intentions, Evan represents the members of society who are consumed with image and commodities to make life easier. When Evan shows his family a fabricated landscape, made as a result of a dammed reservoir, he naïvely calls it “real nature” and states “the big man himself couldn’t have done better.” Later in the film, Evan learns from “the big man himself” just what true, untouched nature should look like.

Before Evan leaves for his congressional duties in Washington, the Buffalo, New York, news station he works for sends him off with a look back at his campaign run. An emotional Evan says he feels “like the Indian in front of all the garbage.” He is referring to the famous “Crying Indian” public service announcement of the 1970’s, which itself was a call to action to stop pollution. Evan, however, uses the reference completely out of context as he compares himself to an iconic environmental symbol, but this line of dialogue does foreshadow Evan’s eventual change of heart about nature and the environment.

Into the Wild

Like *Erin Brockovich*, *Into the Wild* is based on a true story, so the time and location settings of the film are fixed. Since Chris spent his time in Alaska alone and died in the magic bus, no one can ever know for sure whether he talked to himself or ran around without pants on, as is depicted in the film. However, those interpretations of the character by the filmmaker and the actor helps the audience better relate to Chris.

The fact that Chris died in the Alaskan wilderness makes one immediately think he thought he was invincible and the conqueror of nature, almost making the audience dislike him for his apparent disrespect of nature. It is doubtful that Chris did not respect nature; it could just be that he underestimated its power. This lesson—that man is NOT the master of nature—is particularly poignant with Chris' death.

The Simpson's Movie

The Simpson's Movie perhaps has the most references to environmental issues than any other film. The very first scene opens with the rock band Green Day playing a concert and taking a few minutes to say something about the environment. This immediately indicates to the audience that there will probably be more references to the environment throughout the rest of the film.

Another reference to the environment in the film is through the depiction of the Environmental Protection Agency. While the filmmaker's interpretation of the EPA is intended to be farcical and exaggerated, it represents an over-zealous and controlling government agency. On the opposite side of that argument, the EPA could also represent over-zealous environmental activists who go to extreme, and sometimes harmful, lengths to protect the environment. The head of the EPA, while initially trying to save the

environment from the pollution in Springfield, eventually becomes maniacal and thinks that blowing up Springfield is the only viable option to stop the environmental degradation of the town. Ecoterrorism becomes ecotourism when the EPA advertises for the “new Grand Canyon” where Springfield is located. The filmmaker’s portrayal of the EPA is not at all favorable, conveyed when the head of the EPA even comments, “it takes real leadership to fix something you know nothing about.” This quote can represent both the incompetence of the agency and be in reference to the appointment of political positions (like the real EPA administrator) filled by unqualified candidates. This could even be the filmmakers critique on all federal agencies, with the EPA playing the role of scapegoat for this film.

When Homer drives his car passed all the "No Dumping" signs with the intention of disposing of the pig waste in the lake, the last sign he runs over says “you suck.” After Homer dumps the pig waste, the lake bubbles and a black skull and crossbones pops up that says in a menacing voice “evil.” While this scene is meant to be humorous, it conveys a message to the audience that people who dump waste or pollute are, in a sense, evil; the scene essentially turns all polluters into villains, easily changing their stance for their own convenience.

Another reference to environmental issues is when Milhouse says global warming is a myth to avoid getting beat up by Nelson, but Nelson beats him up anyway for “going back on his convictions.” In this case Milhouse represents the individuals who say they support environmental efforts to boost their own image.

After the Simpson’s house is destroyed by a sinkhole on the property, the police chief remarks “they’re China’s problem now,” most likely referring to the dumping of

American waste in China. It is a subtle dig at the use of developing nations for dumping grounds of unwanted and usually toxic trash.

The filmmakers take a cynical approach to environmental messaging, making digs and vilifying polluters, oil companies, the government, and environmental skeptics, but not necessarily communicating about the environmental issue itself.

The Day the Earth Stood Still

In *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, the government, while it may be justified in using force against foreign invaders, does not try for diplomacy and resorts immediately to military might. This action results in Klaatu being shot and his reaffirmation that humans have become too destructive to exist.

One of the main reasons why the human race is to be destroyed is because it has become too consumptive and too reliant on technology in everyday life. Throughout the film, there are random shots of oil rigs, telephone wires, and power plants dotting the landscape, indicating how technology and consumption has destroyed earth's landscape. Klaatu even capitalizes on the technology by hot wiring wires to break out of the military stronghold where he is being held; ironically, technology, which is developed to make life easier for humans, can also be used against humans. Further, when Klaatu decides not to destroy the human race, he still uses an electromagnetic pulse to at least destroy technology and give humans the chance to rebuild without harming the Earth. This could be the filmmaker's attempt to convince the audience that humans still have the opportunity to change their consumptive behaviors.

Wall-E

Although *Wall-E* is an animated film, the use of certain filming techniques supplement the already strong images of pollution and materialism on Earth. In the first 30 minutes of the film, there is no dialogue, just sound effects, robot noises and songs from the musical *Hello, Dolly*. The opening scene of *Wall-E* is set to the upbeat tune “Put on Your Sunday Clothes” from the musical. The lyrics are:

Out there, there's a world outside of Yonkers
Way out there beyond this hick town, Barnaby
There's a slick town, Barnaby
Out there, full of shine and full of sparkle
Close your eyes and see it glisten, Barnaby
Glisten, Barnaby

This song is playing while simultaneous images of colorful galaxies and constellations flash across the screen. On the last line of the song, “Glisten, Barnaby,” the shot pans down onto an image of Earth, then as the camera zooms in, the audience sees how polluted the Earth has become. The song elicits an excited and hopeful response in the audience. Then it is completely let down by the bleak portrait of the Earth. There is no doubt that *Wall-E* is a light-hearted film, but this initial letdown at the beginning of the film sets up how the audience will react to the characters and to the environmental issue.

The depiction of the human race is a reflection on how the current human population is consumptive, lazy, and increasingly inactive. Note that on the *Axiom*, the audience only sees American passengers; obesity rates among Americans are the highest in the world (Karpman & Meade, 2007; Levi et al., 2010; Manfield et al., 2008). The depiction of humans in the film is the filmmaker's critique of the human race. In *Wall-E*, one could argue that while the humans are destructive and indifferent about the pollution

covering the Earth, they are the victims of the consumer power of the Buy N Large Corporation, much like humans in society today.

Avatar

Aside from *The Day After Tomorrow*, *Avatar* is perhaps the one film that is praised for its positive messages about environmental issues. The use of the term “treehugger” to describe the Na’vi immediately symbolizes the tribe as the group of individuals fighting for environmental protection. Jake’s journey from a human Marine to one of the supposed “treehuggers” is also symbolic of the opportunity for anyone to change his or her attitudes about environmental protection. Jake even refers to the lessons Nateri teaches him about how to be a Na’vi as environmentally driven, as he remarks that he hopes “this treehugger crap isn’t on the final.”

Trees themselves play a huge and symbolic part in the film. Trees are used extensively throughout the film as places of great importance to the Na’vi. Home Tree is what the Na’vi calls the giant and ancient tree where the tribe has made its settlement. The Tree of Voices is sacred ground where the Na’vi prays and asks for guidance from the wisdom of their ancestors. It is also symbolically important for Jake and Nateri’s relationship, as it is under this tree they declare their love for each other. The Tree of Souls is the most sacred holy place to the Na’vi and is the representation of their deity. Aside from the spiritual symbolism trees have in the film, they also show physical symbolism, as Grace tries to explain how biologically, trees on Pandora are all connected by an underground network of nerves and roots. Therefore, trees in *Avatar* represent the connectedness of nature.

In one particularly poignant scene before the final battle between the humans and

the Na'vi, Jake prays to the deity, asking for help against the technologically superior humans. Nateri explains to Jake that the deity does not take sides in war; she only protects the balance of nature. However, the animals of the forest mobilize against the humans, and eventually the Na'vi reclaim their lands, seemingly helping protect that balance of nature. The balance of nature is the way the Na'vi regard nature: with respect, balance, and mutual cooperation.

Framing of the Environmental Issue

For the purpose of this study, framing was defined using Zoch and Molleda's (2006) definition that framing "involves selecting a particular viewpoint to bring to the fore as well as communicating some aspect of the whole to make it the salient point or points of the frame." Each film is framed in a pro-environment fashion, with the protagonist fighting for or supporting the protection of nature. In each film, the protagonist is presented as the individual trying to do the right thing, who lives by a moral code and thus, is highly relatable and liked by the audience. Conversely, representations of the villain convey individuals the audience would not want to associate with, and further, would make the audience want to act the opposite way the villain does. This assessment furthers the point that the villains in each film are not necessarily evil, as villains might characteristically be portrayed, but they impede the progress of the main character. However, when the villain is represented by military or government (as it is in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *The Simpson's Movie* and *Avatar*), the characters seem unnecessarily vindictive and cruel. Whether that is the interpretation of the actor or the intention of the filmmaker is unknown.

Additionally, the deliberate use of dialogue also frames characters in a certain

way. In *Fast Food Nation*, Rudy claims that Uniglobe would “slit your throat for a nickel” and claims that it is the “meanest, toughest sons of bitches and they’re proud of it,” representing the company’s greed and unethical business practices. Uniglobe is immediately framed as the villain and more than likely, the audience knows not to support the company’s position in the film.

In most films, the environmental issue corresponded with heavy human casualties or suffering. This indicates that environmental degradation is associated with and results in humans paying the price. This frame could be a tactic by the filmmaker to scare the audience by showing the potential consequences to the human race due to environmental degradation.

Including a science lesson in the film is a straightforward and probably the most-effective way to explain an idea to the audience. This way the audience does not need to interpret what the filmmaker might mean, but rather, the filmmaker tells the audience exactly what he or she means. In cases in which there is a specific lesson, the film is used as a platform to explain science and also is a form of agenda building, getting the audience to think about exactly what the filmmakers want.

Additionally, calls to action are another effective way of framing a message. Only one film, *Two Brothers*, contained a very obvious call to action displayed on screen at the end of the film. The rest of the films, however, rely on the audience to pick up on the nuances of the call to action. This poses a challenge because since the call to action in the majority of the films is so subtle, it could be easily overlooked by the audience. In this case, it would be up to an educator to make the call to action explicit. Exploring the effect of the call to action on the audience could be a potential topic for future research.

While this study views the general public as the audience, it is important to take into account who the filmmakers consider to be their audiences when they are making these movies. While it might be true that pro-environmental actions by individuals can culminate in a positive impact on the environment, it is not likely that the impact will come quickly or effectively unless a large number of people take part. The environmental issues explored in the films might be societal problems, but generally speaking the films themselves can really only target individuals. Perhaps the messages in the film are targeted at individuals in the hope that many people with the same attitude will come together collectively to address the issues presented in the films.

Use of Films to Communicate and Teach Environmental Issues

While further work on establishing a curriculum and discussion topics must be done, these films may be used by environmental groups, educators or any other interested party as an avenue to teach the public about environmental issues that are present in society today. For example, it might be possible to use similar films like *Fast Food Nation* and *Silver City* (both take place in Colorado, both explore similar environmental issues like development, consumption, and treatment of workers) and discuss the similarities and differences in how the environmental themes are portrayed on screen. Or perhaps to make watching the film more fun and interactive, provide a scavenger hunt for certain environmental themes, actions, or characters, like the number of references to trees in *Avatar*, or the number of times Wall-E saves the plant from being destroyed in *Wall-E*. Yet another way to use film to communicate environmental messages is by comparing remakes. *The Day the Earth Stood Still* is the only film in this analysis which is a remake from the classic 1951 film of the same name. An audience can watch both

films, then compare and contrast how each film went about discussing the environmental issue and then consider how the use of film as a communicative platform has changed from the 1950s to today.

The benefit of this research is not limited to just environmental groups and educators. Since protection/treatment of animals was such a commonly recurring theme in the films, animals groups and even zoos could glean from the films how other people (in this case the filmmakers) view animal protection and perhaps inspire ideas on how to better treat and communicate about animals. Several of the films, such as *Avatar*, *Into the Wild*, and *Evan Almighty* have some religious and spiritual messages, so these findings might be of interest to religious groups, especially those that promote spirituality through nature. Even corporations and big businesses, which are so often portrayed as villains in the films, could use these findings to not only see how they are portrayed by filmmakers, but perhaps inspire new actions and policies for corporate social responsibility.

Anytime feature-length films are used for communication and educational purposes, however, a great deal of time and effort is required, both on the part of the educator and the viewer. The above suggestions are just ways that educators or environmental groups can get the public to start thinking about environmental issues, with the possibility that people might become more attune to these issues when they see them in other films or around them in society.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

After viewing and analyzing all of films for this study, and determining how environmental themes are framed in the films, it can be concluded that with proper development of discussion points, fictional feature-length films can be an effective communication and education tool for informing the public about environmental issues. Generally, all the films analyzed for this study have very obvious environmental undertones, especially films like *The Day After Tomorrow*, *Avatar*, and *The Simpson's Movie*. With proper discussion and leading questions for a viewer to think about, however, the potential for a viewer to have a very thought-provoking conversation about environmental issues, which they may previously know very little about, is present.

Admittedly, there are some issues that are more subtle, and environmental themes might not always be apparent to viewers who are not well versed in the environment or science. During the course of this study, since the researcher was actively looking for environmental themes and issues, they became much more obvious and apparent in the films.

As anyone who cares deeply for the environment can attest to, it can be trying to explain an issue like climate change to the public, especially a public that does not have a scientific background and does not understand the complex science behind environmental issues. Films, however, provide an explanation in a format that not only makes those complex ideas easier to understand, but also provides a real-world context. By providing social and entertaining ways for the public to educate themselves about the environment,

environmental groups can open the door for interested parties to start taking a more active role in living a cleaner, greener life.

Chapter 8. Limitations and Future Research

As reflected in the literature review, there is a great deal of research available on the use of nature documentaries, news programming about environmental issues, and television programs with environmental themes to communicate environmental issues to the public. This study excluded documentaries, news programs, and television programs, and only explored how feature films address environmental issues.

This study only analyzed films released in the year 2000 or later. By excluding films released before 2000, this study cannot determine how Hollywood viewed the environment prior to the green resurgence of the past decade.

The films chosen for analysis in this study are not the most-comprehensive list of films that have environmental themes. Arguably, there are additional films excluded from this study that could be considered environmental films. Additionally, 85 percent of the films chosen for analysis are EMA award nominees and winners. While EMA is not associated with this study or the research, this might give the false impression that EMA had a strong influence over the decision to include certain films, and suggest that no other organizations that promote environmentally themed films were utilized for the study.

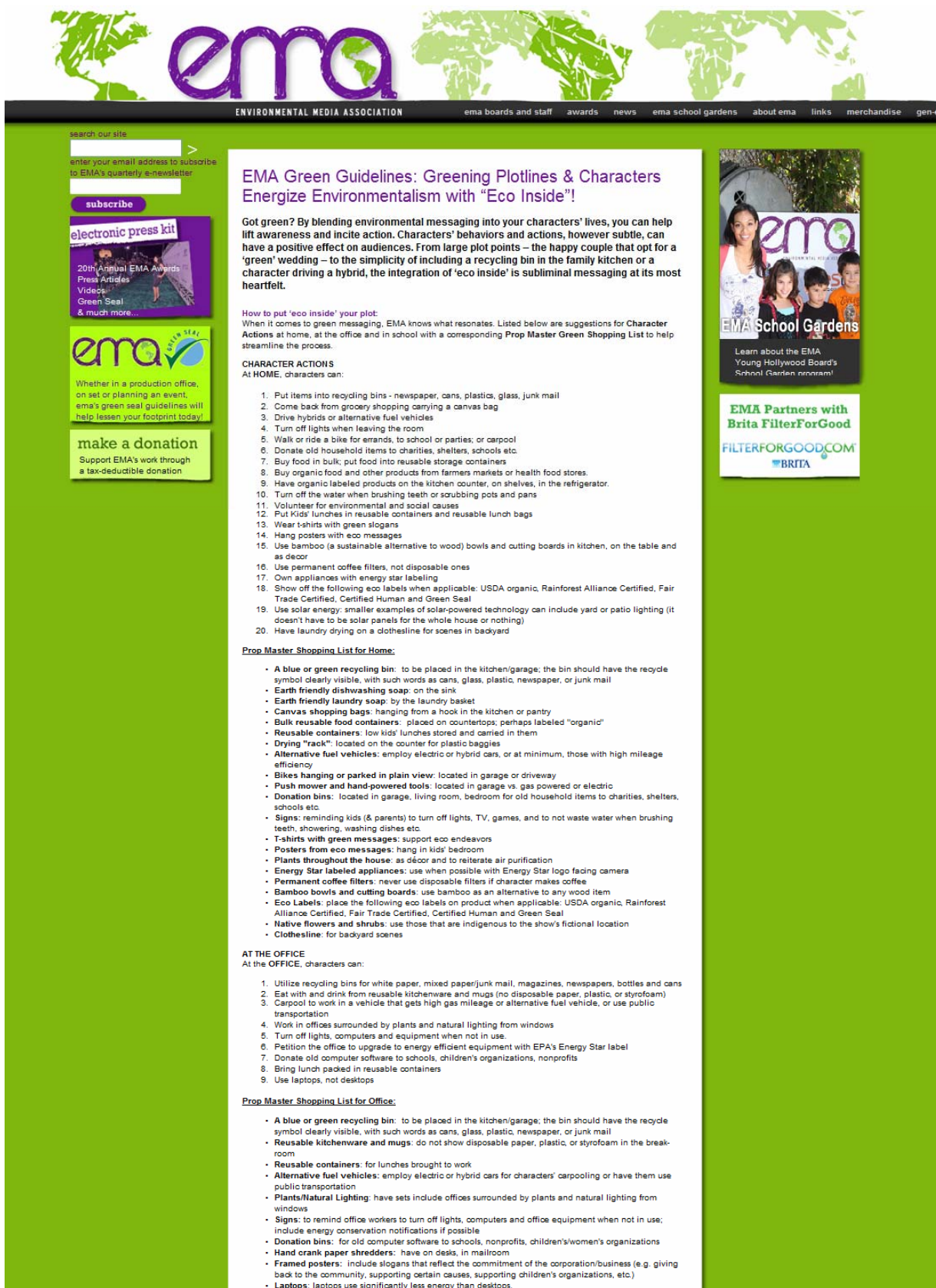
There is no particular film genre that specifically labels a film “environmental.” All of the films in this study are categorized under different genres. For example, Netflix™ film rentals considered *Avatar* an action adventure/fantasy, while *Happy Feet* is considered family animation. Additionally, the films collectively do not represent all genres of film. For instance, the western genre is not included in this analysis. This

relates back to the limitation stated previously, that excluding earlier films limits the opportunity to examine different genres, such as western films, whose presence would be more likely if this study examined films before the year 2000.

Finally, the researcher was the only coder for this study. The absence of a second independent coder reduces the intercoder reliability that is associated with content analysis and increases the likelihood that some important aspect pertaining to the environment could be overlooked.

There is great potential for future research to add onto this study. As previously stated, it is clear that not every environmentally themed film was chosen for this analysis. Exploring environmental themes of the 1990s and earlier, then comparing how environmental messages in films have changed is one avenue of future research. Additionally, this study found that environmental issues were portrayed most prominently in animated films. Another avenue of future study could be to analyze only animated films to determine how environmental messages are conveyed. Since animated films are usually targeted at children, results from a study of this nature would also have implications on how children react to environmental messages. Finally, this study was a content analysis of 12 films, but there no part of this study that gauged audience reactions to environmental messages of the films. Future study could survey study participants' reactions to the environmental message after watching the films and if the film could potentially aide in changing public attitudes and behaviors about the environment.

Appendix A – EMA Green Guidelines (http://www.ema-online.org/green_seal.php)



The image shows a screenshot of the EMA Green Guidelines webpage. The header features the EMA logo (a stylized 'ema' with a green leaf) and a navigation bar with links: 'ema boards and staff', 'awards', 'news', 'ema school gardens', 'about ema', 'links', 'merchandise', and 'gen-e'. Below the header, the page is divided into several sections. On the left, there's a sidebar with a search bar, a newsletter subscription form, and three promotional boxes: 'electronic press kit' (20th Annual EMA Awards Press Articles, Videos, Green Seal & much more...), 'ema green seal' (Whether in a production office, on set or planning an event, ema's green seal guidelines will help lessen your footprint today!), and 'make a donation' (Support EMA's work through a tax-deductible donation). The main content area is titled 'EMA Green Guidelines: Greening Plotlines & Characters Energize Environmentalism with "Eco Inside"!'. It includes a paragraph about the importance of green messaging in film and TV, followed by a list of 20 'CHARACTER ACTIONS' for 'At HOME'. Below this is a 'Prop Master Shopping List for Home' with a detailed list of items to look for in a home. The right sidebar features two promotional images: 'EMA School Gardens' (Learn about the EMA Young Hollywood Board's School Garden program!) and 'EMA Partners with Brita FilterForGood' (FILTERFORGOOD.COM). At the bottom, there's a section for 'At THE OFFICE' with a list of actions and a 'Prop Master Shopping List for Office'.

EMA Green Guidelines: Greening Plotlines & Characters Energize Environmentalism with "Eco Inside"!

Got green? By blending environmental messaging into your characters' lives, you can help lift awareness and incite action. Characters' behaviors and actions, however subtle, can have a positive effect on audiences. From large plot points – the happy couple that opt for a 'green' wedding – to the simplicity of including a recycling bin in the family kitchen or a character driving a hybrid, the integration of 'eco inside' is subliminal messaging at its most heartfelt.

How to put 'eco inside' your plot:
When it comes to green messaging, EMA knows what resonates. Listed below are suggestions for **Character Actions** at home, at the office and in school with a corresponding **Prop Master Green Shopping List** to help streamline the process.

CHARACTER ACTIONS
At HOME, characters can:

1. Put items into recycling bins - newspaper, cans, plastics, glass, junk mail
2. Come back from grocery shopping carrying a canvas bag
3. Drive hybrids or alternative fuel vehicles
4. Turn off lights when leaving the room
5. Walk or ride a bike for errands, to school or parties; or carpool
6. Donate old household items to charities, shelters, schools etc.
7. Buy food in bulk; put food into reusable storage containers
8. Buy organic food and other products from farmers markets or health food stores.
9. Have organic labeled products on the kitchen counter, on shelves, in the refrigerator.
10. Turn off the water when brushing teeth or scrubbing pots and pans
11. Volunteer for environmental and social causes
12. Put Kids' lunches in reusable containers and reusable lunch bags
13. Wear t-shirts with green slogans
14. Hang posters with eco messages
15. Use bamboo (a sustainable alternative to wood) bowls and cutting boards in kitchen, on the table and as decor
16. Use permanent coffee filters, not disposable ones
17. Own appliances with energy star labeling
18. Show off the following eco labels when applicable: USDA organic, Rainforest Alliance Certified, Fair Trade Certified, Certified Human and Green Seal
19. Use solar energy; smaller examples of solar-powered technology can include yard or patio lighting (it doesn't have to be solar panels for the whole house or nothing)
20. Have laundry drying on a clothesline for scenes in backyard

Prop Master Shopping List for Home:

- **A blue or green recycling bin:** to be placed in the kitchen/garage; the bin should have the recycle symbol clearly visible, with such words as cans, glass, plastic, newspaper, or junk mail
- **Earth friendly dishwashing soap:** on the sink
- **Earth friendly laundry soap:** by the laundry basket
- **Canvas shopping bags:** hanging from a hook in the kitchen or pantry
- **Bulk reusable food containers:** placed on countertops; perhaps labeled "organic"
- **Reusable containers:** low kids' lunches stored and carried in them
- **Drying "rack":** located on the counter for plastic baggies
- **Alternative fuel vehicles:** employ electric or hybrid cars, or at minimum, those with high mileage efficiency
- **Bikes hanging or parked in plain view:** located in garage or driveway
- **Push mower and hand-powered tools:** located in garage vs. gas powered or electric
- **Donation bins:** located in garage, living room, bedroom for old household items to charities, shelters, schools etc.
- **Signs:** reminding kids (& parents) to turn off lights, TV, games, and to not waste water when brushing teeth, showering, washing dishes etc.
- **T-shirts with green messages:** support eco endeavors
- **Posters from eco messages:** hang in kids' bedroom
- **Plants throughout the house:** as décor and to reiterate air purification
- **Energy Star labeled appliances:** use when possible with Energy Star logo facing camera
- **Permanent coffee filters:** never use disposable filters if character makes coffee
- **Bamboo bowls and cutting boards:** use bamboo as an alternative to any wood item
- **Eco Labels:** place the following eco labels on product when applicable: USDA organic, Rainforest Alliance Certified, Fair Trade Certified, Certified Human and Green Seal
- **Native flowers and shrubs:** use those that are indigenous to the show's fictional location
- **Clothesline:** for backyard scenes

At THE OFFICE
At the OFFICE, characters can:

1. Utilize recycling bins for white paper, mixed paper/junk mail, magazines, newspapers, bottles and cans
2. Eat with and drink from reusable kitchenware and mugs (no disposable paper, plastic, or styrofoam)
3. Carpool to work in a vehicle that gets high gas mileage or alternative fuel vehicle, or use public transportation
4. Work in offices surrounded by plants and natural lighting from windows
5. Turn off lights, computers and equipment when not in use.
6. Petition the office to upgrade to energy efficient equipment with EPA's Energy Star label
7. Donate old computer software to schools, children's organizations, nonprofits
8. Bring lunch packed in reusable containers
9. Use laptops, not desktops

Prop Master Shopping List for Office:

- **A blue or green recycling bin:** to be placed in the kitchen/garage; the bin should have the recycle symbol clearly visible, with such words as cans, glass, plastic, newspaper, or junk mail
- **Reusable kitchenware and mugs:** do not show disposable paper, plastic, or styrofoam in the break-room
- **Reusable containers:** for lunches brought to work
- **Alternative fuel vehicles:** employ electric or hybrid cars for characters' carpooling or have them use public transportation
- **Plants/Natural Lighting:** have sets include offices surrounded by plants and natural lighting from windows
- **Signs:** to remind office workers to turn off lights, computers and office equipment when not in use; include energy conservation notifications if possible
- **Donation bins:** for old computer software to schools, nonprofits, children's/women's organizations
- **Hand crank paper shredders:** have on desks, in mailroom
- **Framed posters:** include slogans that reflect the commitment of the corporation/business (e.g. giving back to the community, supporting certain causes, supporting children's organizations, etc.)
- **Laptops:** laptops use significantly less energy than desktops.

Appendix B – Total Film Revenues

Erin Brockovich

Running Time: 132 minutes
Released by Universal
Domestic Gross: \$125,548,685
International Gross: \$132,256,558
Total Gross: \$257,805,243

Silver City

Running Time: 129 minutes
Released by Newmarket Films
Domestic Gross: \$1,017,376
International Gross: --
Total Gross: \$1,017,376

The Day After Tomorrow

Running Time: 123 minutes
Released by 20th Century Fox
Domestic Gross: \$186,740,799
International Gross: \$357,531,603
Total Gross: \$544,272,402

Two Brothers

Running Time: 105 minutes
Released by Universal
Domestic Gross: \$18,947,630
International Gross: \$20,977,973
Total Gross: \$39,925,603

Syriana

Running Time: 128 minutes
Released by Warner Brothers
Domestic Gross: \$50,824,620
International Gross: \$44,200,000
Total Gross: \$95,024,620

Fast Food Nation

Running Time: 114 minutes
Released by 20th Century Fox
Domestic Gross: \$1,005,539
International Gross: --
Total Gross: \$1,005,539

Happy Feet

Running Time: 108 minutes
Released by Warner Brothers
Domestic Gross: \$198,000,317
International Gross: \$187,000,000
Total Gross: \$385,000,317

Evan Almighty

Running Time: 78 minutes
Released by Newmarket Films
Domestic Gross: \$100,289,690
International Gross: \$72,929,590
Total Gross: \$173,219,280

Into the Wild

Running Time: 148 minutes
Released by Paramount
Domestic Gross: \$18,354,356
International Gross: \$35,459,481
Total Gross: \$53,813,837

The Simpson's Movie

Running Time: 87 minutes
Released by 20th Century Fox
Domestic Gross: \$183,135,014
International Gross: \$343,936,008
Total Gross: \$527,071,022

There Will Be Blood

Running Time: 158 minutes
Released by Paramount
Domestic Gross: \$40,222,514
International Gross: \$36,318,481
Total Gross: \$76,540,995

The Day the Earth Stood Still

Running Time: 104 minutes
Released by 20th Century Fox
Domestic Gross: \$79,363,785
International Gross: \$151,471,279
Total Gross: \$230,835,064

Wall-E

Running Time: 98 minutes
Released by Walt Disney Studios/Pixar
Domestic Gross: \$223,808,164
International Gross: \$308,934,939
Total Gross: \$532,743,103

Avatar

Running Time: 162 minutes
Released by 20th Century Fox
Domestic Gross: \$760,507,625
International Gross: \$2,022,105,245
Total Gross: \$2,782,612,870

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